CRYING FOR CHANGE: EXAMINING THE USE OF PERIOD MELODRAMA AND THE MELODRAMATIC MODE IN CONTEMPORARY QUEER REPRESENTATION

Justin Bonthuys, B.A.

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2021

APPROVED:

Harry Benshoff, Committee Chair
George S. Larke-Walsh, Committee Member
Jacqueline Foertsch, Committee Member
Steven Cobb, Interim Chair of the Department of Media Arts and Associate Dean in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Tamara L. Brown, Executive Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Victor Prybutok, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School

Bonthuys, Justin. *Crying for Change: Examining the Use of Period Melodrama and the Melodramatic Mode in Contemporary Queer Representation*. Master of Arts (Media Industry and Critical Studies), August 2021, 92 pp., bibliography, 134 titles.

This thesis illustrates how Melodrama and the melodramatic mode have been adapted within contemporary cinema as both a means of commenting on prior LGBTQI representation, and of exposing mainstream audiences to the issues still faced by many within this spectrum. Through my analyses of *Carol* (2015), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and *A Single Man* (2009), I examine how filmmakers have drawn on Melodrama as both an aesthetic form, and as a reference to the broader field of generic history and criticism which ground it as a subversive form of societal critique. By focusing specifically on how these three films portray ideological issues of gender, stereotyping, parenthood, aging, and personal shame, my thesis argues that these films are making a commentary on the damaging effects of these discourses on broader society. I also simultaneously question whether the Period Melodrama as a genre can ever fully escape the conservative nature of this form, as well as the implications of continuing to portray those on the LGBTQI spectrum as victims.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank Bette Davis, without whom I would never have stumbled upon *The Petrified Forest* playing on TCM in my early teens and discovered my passion for Melodrama and the movies. To Mom, thank you for being my living thesaurus/opinion giver. To Dad, thank you for driving me twenty minutes to the library whenever I asked. To James, thank you for sending me expletive laden motivational voice notes whenever I asked for them. To Dr. Benshoff, thank you for your support and for your patience with my run on sentences and 'incorrect' use of single quotation marks. Finally, I would like to thank my entire committee for their patience in dealing with the Melodrama that is Crying for Change: Examining the use of Period Melodrama and the Melodramatic Mode in Contemporary Queer Representation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Melodrama: Genre or Mode?

> Perhaps, then, the social Melodrama has been one of the means by which the American and English middle classes have so successfully adjusted themselves to the drastic social and cultural changes of the last century and a half. If so, it will be interesting to see how the formulas of Social Melodrama evolve to confront the enormous changes that will face our society in the future. (Cawelti 74)

"Melodrama" has been theorized as both a descriptor and a genre within film studies since the 1970s. Much of this theory arose out of renewed critical interest in works by directors such as Vincente Minnelli and Douglas Sirk. Critics were interested in what could retrospectively be read as subtle and ironic critiques of the conservative and oppressive social milieus of the 1950s and early 1960s. Many feminist critics also studied these films because of the ways in which they placed female subjectivity and desire at their centers. This thesis analyzes how contemporary filmmakers have drawn on Melodrama as both an aesthetic form, and as a reference to the broader field of generic history and criticism which ground it as a subversive form of societal critique. Through my analyses of *Carol* (2015), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and *A Single Man* (2009), I illustrate how contemporary filmmakers have adapted Melodrama and the melodramatic mode as both a means of commenting on prior representation of LGBTQI individuals in media, and of exposing mainstream audiences to the issues still faced by many within this spectrum. I accomplish this through specific focus on how these three films portray ideological issues of gender, stereotyping, parenthood, aging, and personal shame. In doing so, my thesis argues that they are also making a commentary on the damaging effects these discourses have on broader society. I also simultaneously question whether the Period Melodrama as a genre can ever fully escape the conservative nature of this form, as well as the

implications of continuing to portray those on the LGBTQI spectrum as victims.

The term "Melodrama" is used in numerous ways across literary, dramatic and filmic scholarship. It can be used as an adjective to describe elements of a work, can call to mind specific visual or aural tropes (such as those of television soap operas), and can be used to justify a text for membership within Melodrama as a genre in the same manner as terms such as "western" or "science fiction." Because of this fluidity, Melodrama is polysemic, with its meaning depending on the context in which it is used, as well as on which historical precursors an author is referring to in their use of the term. This introduction explores how Melodrama and the melodramatic mode are complex phenomena which have evolved beyond questions of genre and even being considered as purely fictional. I believe that the usage of the term as both a genre and a mode of storytelling are of equal importance in understanding its pervasiveness in modern cinema and culture. For purposes of clarity, going forward I refer to Melodrama as a preexisting genre using capitalization, and melodrama as a mode of storytelling without capitalization so as to distinguish between these two separate conceptions. Before considering Melodrama as a term within film studies, it is important to consider its historical precedents within theatre.

Melodrama is a simple form which presents the greater ideological conflicts within society on a personal level in the trials and tribulations of its protagonists. In the theatre, the hardships and suffering experienced by the innocent protagonists of early 18th century Melodramas could be understood as the struggles of an emerging bourgeoisie against the remnants of feudalism. In the wake of the upheaval of the French Revolution, theorists such as Brooks (1976) and Elsaesser (1972) have argued that it took on the more conservative function of reaffirming bourgeois values and ideologies, and affirming the existence of what Brooks calls a "moral universe" in the absence of structuring bodies such as the church and the monarchy.

In his book, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976), Peter Brooks discusses the origins of the term Melodrama as it first appeared in 18th century French theatre. Prior to the French Revolution, a monopoly existed in French theatre which favored the official, patented theatres: the Italiens, the Opéra and the Théâtre-Francais. Solely these companies were allowed to perform classical repertory and full-scale new productions, and secondary theatres were banned from the use of the spoken word. Brooks posits that because of these limitations and the fact that they were performing to a largely uneducated audience, secondary theatres (such as the Théâtre de la Gaîté and the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique) focused their attentions on the spectacular visual signs of drama, such as décor, machinery, banners, inscriptions, gestures, and actions. They also relied heavily on musical accompaniment. In many ways these conditions mirrored those of early cinema, which was also confined to silence. When the pantomimes produced by secondary theatres were allowed to incorporate dialogue as of the early 1780s, the play texts were subject to review by both the Théâtre-Français and the royal censors before they were performed. Brooks argues that as a result of this, the pantomimes of this period became a "theatre of action and visual image, frequently offering ingenious representations of meaning and almost always offering a dramatic conflict of clear emblems" (84). When spoken word was used, it was often not as a crucial element to the structure of a play, but rather a dramatic emotional flourish.

Brooks acknowledges that the common connotations of the term Melodrama include "The indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy; persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety"(11). He argues (somewhat pejoratively) that while the term may most often refer to what he calls the

"cheap and banal" Melodrama of the soap opera, there are a range of examples within any literary field. The films I have chosen for my analyses are evidence of this, as all three bear traces of mass culture inspirations, such as soap operas and Douglas Sirk's Hollywood films. The tropes and aesthetic qualities of these forms can be seen repurposed in these independent queer art films such as *Carol* (2015), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *A Single Man* (2009), and then aimed at a more mainstream audience. Brooks posits that enterprising use of the melodramatic mode of conception and representation can be a means toward reaching a fundamental drama of the moral life and finding terms to express this. He argues that given the historical context in which the genre labeled Melodrama came into being, the melodramatic mode is in fact decidedly modern.

Brooks argues that the overthrow of both the monarchy and the church during the French Revolution resulted in the "shattering of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society" and the "invalidation of literary forms such as tragedy and comedy"(15) which depended on this kind of society. As such, Brooks argues that Melodrama shares the rhetorical goals of the Revolution, aiming to locate, impose, and express basic ethical and psychic truths. The social implications of Melodrama might vary between the conservative and the radical, but its form is democratic, seeking to be equally legible and accessible to everyone. This impulse can still be seen in modern Melodramas and soap operas, which are genres that have mass cultural appeal and are understood and enjoyed by broad demographics. Brooks argues that in the absence of traditional patterns of moral order to provide social cohesion, Melodrama strives to prove the existence of a moral universe which can be called upon to restore social order in the face of villainy and injustice. In this way, Melodrama can be seen as

representing both an impulse toward re- sacralization, and the impossibility of the sacred existing in anything but personal terms.

In his analysis of the novels of Henry James and Honoré de Balzac, Brooks does not argue that the novelists were influenced by Melodrama as a genre. Rather, he proposes that Melodrama as a genre can serve as a useful point of reference in identifying and analyzing elements of the melodramatic in their work. Brooks thus argues that the novels of James and Balzac make use of the mode of melodrama, but do not fall within the "reductive and literalistic" (20) genre of Melodrama as it originally existed. In many ways this perspective mirrors the status and usage of melodrama as both a term and a generic classification within American film studies.

Steve Neale argues that when "Melodrama" was first used to describe films in industry journals, press releases, and even the dialog of films themselves throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, they were understood to mean "crime, guns and violence; they meant heroines in peril; they meant action, tension and suspense; and they meant villains … (who) could masquerade as 'apparently harmless'… sustaining suspense until the last minute" (*Genre and Hollywood* 179). These usages suggest films which echo Brooks' thesis on Melodramatic theatre, as they build their suspense around the existence (and eventual triumph) of a higher moral order. The definition of Melodrama within film studies later began to shift however as critics began reexamining the domestic dramas of directors such as Douglas Sirk and Vincente Minelli. As Christine Gledhill notes, "Through the discovery of Sirk, a genre came into view" (*Home is Where the Heart Is* 7).

Melodrama gained significant attention in film studies in the 1970s, through Freudian and Neo-Marxist analyses of the "Family Melodrama." Arguably its most important theoretical impetus came from auteur studies, which sparked a renewed interest and critical reappraisal of

the work of directors such as King Vidor, Vincente Minelli, and most eminently Douglas Sirk. In many ways, Sirk helped to solidify both the film studies definition and the critical reputation of Melodrama through an interview he gave to Jon Halliday in 1972. While the interview does not specifically concern the origins of Melodrama, Sirk does reference important literary inspirations within his own work, such as Shakespeare and ancient Greek Tragedy. He also details how he made use of "deus ex machina" endings which subverted and questioned the bourgeois values and ideologies of the scripts that he was assigned while working in Hollywood.

Both Sirk's reputation as an ironist and his contributions to the form and structure of film Melodrama eventually became associated with the "genre" of the Family Melodrama itself. This is reflected in the work of critics at the time. Thomas Elsaesser's essay Tales of Sound and Fury (1972) both delineated the Family Melodrama as a genre within film studies and argued for its subversive potential. Similarly, to Brooks, Elsaesser posits that the roots of Melodrama can be found in medieval morality plays and forms of oral narrative such as fairy tales and folk songs. He argues that Melodrama shares with these forms a "Nonpsychological conception of the dramatis personae, who figure less as autonomous individuals than to transmit the action and link the various locales within a total constellation" (44). Elsaesser ultimately speculates that the most direct influence on what he calls the "sophisticated family Melodrama" of the 1940s and 1950s is the romantic drama which emerged after the French Revolution. He argues that all subsequent forms of Melodrama including the cinema draw on its elements of "interiorization and personalization of what are primarily ideological conflicts, together with the metaphorical interpretation of class conflict" (46). Within the Family Melodrama this conflict arises from the characters' inability to take strong actions or effect change within the stifling and repressive milieu of 1950s America. This repression operates on numerous levels (including social class,

gender and sexuality) and Elsaesser argues that all of its characters can equally be seen as victims. Melodrama thus provides multifaceted levels on which filmmakers can showcase this repression as it affects different societal demographics.

While the predominant conception of film Melodrama may be that it is a genre that is centered around and marketed towards women, critics such as Thomas Schatz have argued that Melodramas are in fact far broader in both their focus and their critiques of society. In *The Family Melodrama* (1981) Schatz proposes several different subgenres within Melodrama, including what he calls the "male weepie." Schatz argues that the central concern in this subgenre is problematizing the passing of the "role of middle-American 'Dad' from one generation to the next." In questioning the masculinity and virility at the heart of society, Schatz argues that these films offer a direct and straightforward critique of American middle-class ideology. The enforcement of the Motion Picture Production Code meant that Hollywood films faced severe censorship from 1934 through the mid-50s; however, theorists such as David Gerstner (1997) have argued that filmmakers like Vincente Minnelli included societal critiques about the topics they could not portray through the use of structured silence. When Minnelli adopted the 1953 stage play *Tea and Sympathy* to film in 1956, he was expressly forbidden from mentioning the homosexuality central to its narrative. Gerstner posits that the way in which masculine posturing is juxtaposed with an aestheticized misè-en-scene in the film circumvents these restrictions by hyperbolizing cultural anxieties around masculinity. As such, hypermasculine homosociality is used within the film to represent American homophobia in the 1950s. He argues that Minnelli draws attention to the homosexual themes in the narrative precisely through the "hyperbolic cacophony of silencing" of that which he could not portray (15). Gerstner reinforces this argument by citing an interview in the *New York Times* with MGM

Unit Producer Pandro S. Berman, who stated that "We never say in the film that the boy has homosexual tendencies… but any adult who has ever heard of the word and understands its meaning will clearly understand this suspicion in the film"(20). Similar ambiguities can be seen in films such as Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) which also problematizes generational differences and positions emotionally sensitive young men as societal outsiders (while also coding them as possible homosexuals).

Classic film Melodramas have served as a particular area of focus and debate for feminist scholars because of the unique emphasis that many of them place on female perspectives and tensions arising in "traditionally" feminine spaces. Scholars such as Laura Mulvey(1998), Mary Ann Doane (1984), and E. Ann Kaplan(1990, 2000) have argued (in keeping with Mulvey's pioneering model of the cinematic gaze) that when watching Melodramas and "women's pictures," the female spectator is at risk of overidentifying with the central female figure, and thus subjecting herself to the same victimization in an almost masochistic sense. In contrast to this, scholars such as Christine Gledhill(1986), Pam Cook(1991), Linda Williams(1998) and Steve Neale (1986) have argued that pathos and empathy are crucial components of Melodrama, and that a "surprising power [lies] in identifying with victimhood." (Williams 47). This debate highlights that the impossibilities present within Melodramatic films go beyond the surface level of implausible narratives and reflects the multifaceted nature of the identification that they encourage. For this reason, Gledhill and Williams have theorized that Melodrama can be understood beyond the level of genre and can instead be considered as a dramatic mode as oppose to realism and modernism. Mercer and Shingler summarize this concept, saying:

> Where realism and modernism exposes gaps in bourgeois ideology, Melodrama insists on the realities of life in bourgeois democracy and, at the same time, implicitly recognizes the limits of conventional representation (for example, exposing the limits of language, its inability to express or articulate certain contradictions). (88)

In *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility* (2016) Jonathan Goldberg proposes that, in filmic Melodrama, these limits and indeterminacies arise out of how cinema combines musical, dramatic and visual excess. Goldberg argues that these excesses render Melodrama resistant to normative values and allow it to encourage identifications which exceed the mythic binaries and identity roles imposed by society. The understanding of melodrama as a mode or a set of narrative and descriptive tools is useful because many works that exhibit melodramatic tropes also display a large degree of genre hybridity.

Modern filmic examples of Melodrama usually place their narratives in a period setting. The most popular settings for modern Melodramatic narratives have tended to be the 1950s and 1960s. This is arguably when the genre went through its classical phase and went on to become more refined, and it could be that modern filmmakers are attempting to evoke the prestige of these original examples. Thomas Schatz notes, however, that "while current popular evocations of 1950s tend to wax nostalgic, projecting an era of stability, prosperity, and widespread optimism, those who look more closely at that period's cultural documents may see through the facile naivete to an altogether bleaker reflection"(152). While this assessment is somewhat pessimistic and pejorative, I would argue that in many ways, this nostalgia for the past in contemporary Melodrama, particularly in the form of aesthetic and narrative styles, can actually serve much the same function as the sentimentality and excessiveness of the mise en scené in classical Melodrama, acting to ameliorate or disguise critiques which are relevant to the modern day but might otherwise be deemed too controversial if portrayed in a contemporary setting. This is also evidenced by a recent trend in films and television which are nostalgic for, or set in the 1980s, a similarly conservative era in American history. Many of these can be seen making similar critiques of issues still relevant today such as the AIDS crisis and governmental

oppression. A major drawback of setting a narrative within these eras, however, is that while they may be transgressive to a degree, they must still concede somewhat to the conservatism of the time in which they are set in order remain realistic.

Contemporary applications of the narrative structures and characterization of melodrama have broadened beyond fictional forms such as theatre and cinema. Recent scholars of Melodrama have applied these concepts to various forms of non-fiction media in ways which have significantly expanded and enriched the understanding of melodrama as a mode. In a 2016 anthology titled *Melodrama: After the Tears*, editors Jörg Metelmann and Scott Loren present works by a number of authors which explore how Melodrama has grown beyond genre or fiction to become a pervasive cultural mode, with its own signifying practices and interpretive codes. These coalesce around the idea of the emotional power inherent in the subject position of "victim." In identifying how these patterns are adopted within various cultural spheres, the authors draw on a wide range of nonfiction case studies, including confessional style talk shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show,* American conservative politics, the Holocaust and the ideological ramifications of the 9/11 terror attacks. In assembling this anthology, Metelmann and Loren ultimately question the political ramifications of melodramatic victimhood as they apply to contemporary society, and argue the significance of "victim" as a speaking position within modern mediascapes.

In her chapter from the anthology titled "The Melodrama of the Self," sociologist Eva Illouz argues that victims have come to be defined not by the objective harm that they have experienced, nor by their relationship with regards to a specific institution (159). Using examples such as guests appearing on the *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and the way in which Winfrey herself presents her life story, Illouz instead proposes that victims are those who make use of specific

autobiographical and societal narratives to shape their identities as victims. Illouz argues that life stories or autobiographies make use of a specific cultural form and employ events within a person's life within a framework or by linking stories related to a common theme. These narratives are never entirely idiosyncratic but instead become collective because of their connections to master narratives and what cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner calls "grand cultural key scenarios." Examples of this cited by Illouz include dimensions such as "finding one's great love" or "being redeemed." These connections can be argued as providing life stories with a "universal legibility" similar to that referenced by Brooks in early stage Melodrama. This is because, like Elsaesser argues of the protagonists of early Melodrama, the stories of these victims are stripped of much of their specificity and are instead conceived nonpsychologically. As a result of this, understanding the individual on an idiomatic level becomes less important than knowing how they relate or contribute to the collective cultural narrative of those telling the story.

Numerous examples of personal biography being used in this way can be seen throughout LGBTQI history and culture. These range from individual people becoming emblematic of an entire event or movement such as Marsha P. Johnson and the Stonewall riots to tragic victims whose stories were adapted across a variety of mediums such as Brandon Teena and Matthew Shepard. This can even be seen occurring with stories of individuals who are not themselves a part of the LGBTQI spectrum. An example of this can be seen in the case of Ryan White, a straight Indianan teenager who was infected with HIV after a blood transfusion, or the lives of Hollywood actresses such as Judy Garland or Bette Davis whose personal struggles and battles against sexism and discrimination struck a chord with many on LGBTQI individuals facing similar issues. Illouz also notes how many biographical tales simultaneously fall within a

subcategory of “Therapeutic Narratives.” She argues that within these narratives, it is the “goal” of the story which dictates how it is told, and that this effectively allows for the melodramatic emplotment of the self. Illouz argues that within a therapeutic narrative, the “proper ending” of the story (in which the teller becomes emancipated, self-realized, active or assertive) retroactively determines the complications of the story and what it is that the teller must overcome. As such, the tension in these narratives is sustained by suffering and hardships and the therapeutic story becomes inherently circular. Illouz thus argues that therapeutic culture generates a narrative structure in which “suffering and victimhood actually define a self”(164). This can be seen in all three of the films which I have chosen for my analyses, as none of the films’ protagonists are ever shown to be unequivocally happy or free from persecution.

In his chapter entitled “Melodrama and Victimhood” Thomas Elsaesser argues that victimhood has become an important means of having one’s voice heard within the modern mediascape. Elsaesser argues that the subject position of victim carries with it a degree of power, as through it one serves as a marker of “authenticity” or subjective truth (36-37). In exchange for this however, he posits that the voice and suffering of the victim is “harvested” by television in much the same way as the scandal of celebrity lives or the ambitions of those who appear in reality competitions. Ultimately, Elsaesser argues that the same contradictory elements which formulate this subject position (such as victimhood and power, and rights and entitlements) are also those which make it morally precarious and politically volatile.

Elsaesser also analyzes the relationship between victimhood and what he calls the ‘silent witnesses’ of the middle class. He argues that victimhood has become a desirable subject position because it allows one to alleviate guilt, while still remaining below the radar of personal responsibility. In elaborating on this idea, Elsaesser draws on the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj

Žižek's metaphor of the Starbucks System. Žižek draws on the example of Starbucks coffee to describe what he sees as the distinction between "simple consumerism" in which customers would simply feel guilty about their purchases and the form offered by businesses such as Starbucks, which allow the consumer to make a purchase while including in the price a countermeasure (such as a charitable donation) which allays this guilt. This type of consumerism is a possible explanation for why contemporary queer Themed independent films are able to become popular with broader mainstream audiences. By watching these films which question heteronormative ideologies, audiences are able to allay their guilt for occupying a position of privilege within these societies while also feeling as though they are playing a part in passively counteracting homophobic rhetoric. The form of Melodrama would seem to be particularly suitable for this process when considering how philosphers such as Žižek interpret ideology.

In his 2012 documentary, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Žižek argues that engaging with mainstream ideology is in fact pleasurable, and to step outside of it is a painful experience. He thus argues that one must be forced to break free from ideology in what is often a process of "violent liberation." As Žižek notes, "if you trust simply your spontaneous sense of wellbeing for whatever you will never get free. Freedom hurts"(Žižek). In many ways, his arguments reveal how Filmic Melodrama is an ideal format for exposing and engaging with the audience's relation to ideology. In order to be free from the ideologies which constitute society, one needs to be able to recognize and acknowledge the ways in which these structures appear. Directors have drawn on Melodrama as a means for the critique of these structures throughout film history. While the "spontaneous sense of wellbeing" to which Žižek refers was integral to early stage Melodrama and the establishment of what Brooks refers to as a "moral universe"; later film Melodramas such as those by Douglas Sirk or Rainer Werner Fassbinder question whether this moral

imperative really exists and reveal how the promises made by such rhetoric are in fact false. The violence which liberates the viewer from such delusions need not be literal in nature, and in Melodrama it may occur on the level of emotion, narrative irony, and pathos. This is also reflected in the way that Melodrama is often centered on class and the domestic. Žižek uses the example of psychoanalytical patients who feel guilty not because they indulged in excessive pleasures, but because they feel guilty for not enjoying what they already have. This is often seen in the domestic Melodrama, in which protagonists live unhappy and unfulfilled lives in the gilded cage of the middle-class suburban home. Ultimately the sense of lack experienced by many filmic Melodramatic protagonists emerges from what Žižek refers to as the ultimate melancholic experience, the lack of desire itself. In filmic Melodrama, it is thus the unexpected awakening of this desire which gives the narrative its dramatic impetus.

Many queer theorists have postulated that the showcasing of personal shame possesses a similar power to the "violence" theorized by Žižek. They argue that shame can serve as a means of encouraging empathy and calling for collective change in society. In "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick speculates as to the unitive qualities of witnessing someone else's shame, stating that it can flood the viewer and "delineate [their] precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable"(50). In this way, she argues that shame is both contagious and individuating. The pathos that is encouraged in Melodramas can thus be argued as a potent rhetorical tool for exposing audiences to the suffering experienced by the marginalized groups it presents. In the contemporary queer Melodrama, it can expound on the stigma, fears and suffering still faced by many LGBTQI people today.

The subversive and critical power of film Melodrama can be seen to stem from its ability to both recreate and question what Roland Barthes calls "mythic speech." Barthes argues that

myth is a form of secondary signification which draws on preexisting linguistic signs in order to produce a new and distorted meaning. In this way, myth is defined not by the object of its message, but by the way in which this message is delivered. One of the main examples of myth discussed by Barthes in his work *Mythologies* (1972) is bourgeois ideology. He describes the bourgeoisie as "The social class which does not want to be named" (137), in many ways preempting Elsaesser's conception of them as silent witnesses. Barthes argues that myth attempts to obscure its historical origins and the fact that it was "made." Rather, it attempts to present itself as the way that things have always been, as the "natural order." He points out that "everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world" (139). Through its use of irony and distanciation, film Melodrama renders these relations hyper-visible and questions whether they are as indispensable and benign as they appear.

Stage Melodrama as theorized by Brooks has had what Elsaesser calls a "mythologizing function" in the ways that it sought to establish a new moral and social order after the French Revolution. By contrast, classical family Melodramas as they have been theorized in film studies are focused on exposing and critiquing the myths which serve as the bedrock for traditional bourgeois values. This is particularly evident within the narrative structure of the films, which build the emotional tension of their characters to tremendous heights, only to end in unsatisfying and unresolved conclusions. Even when these films end on a "happy" note there is always (particularly in the films of Douglas Sirk) an ironic sense of compromise, as the protagonist does not find the solution to all of their problems, but rather accepts the happiest resolution that they can within the limits that society has placed upon them. Theorists such as David Gerstner(1997) argue however that the tendency within film studies to value the genre of Melodrama only as a

site for the symptomatic rendering of repression means to neglect examination of how these symptoms are produced and represented within the texts themselves.

Melodrama and LGBTQI Representation

In many ways, myths and stereotypes operate concurrently as a means of making visible and separating the "abnormal" from the "normal" and reinforcing the dominant social order. This can be seen in both stage and film Melodrama, which rely on broadly scripted and externally motivated characters to create distinct heroes and villains(Sheldon 1984, Dyer 1984, 1993). In what is arguably the most comprehensive survey of homosexual representation in cinema, *The Celluloid Closet*(1987)Vito Russo identifies a number of historical trends in the portrayal of both gay and lesbian characters and the storylines of films which place them at their center. His work was later expanded upon and turned into a feature length documentary directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman in 1996. Many of the trends these works identify, such as the effeminate pansy-ish man, the aggressive and masculine lesbian, the ambiguous homosocial duo and the predatory (and often villainous) older lover- are still seen in contemporary media and have since developed into cliched tropes and stereotypes.

The vast majority of queer representation prior to the 1950s can be seen evoking Peter Brooks' definition of Melodrama as a moralizing force. Mainstream films from this period could not portray homosexuality outright. When queers were represented, it was usually through the use of gender nonconforming behaviors as a comedic punchline, or the coding of queers as villainous or pitiable caricatures. This could be seen across genres beyond the drama, with many horror films featuring villains whose dark desires are often made deliberately ambiguous through their attacks on both men and women. In this way, monstrosity became conflated with the non-heteronormative such as in *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) when the titular character seeks help

from a psychiatrist after the destruction of her father's remains fails to release her from her "curse." On the exploitation circuit, films such as the drama *Children of Loneliness*(1937) showed a young woman's homosexual inclinations being cured through her marriage to a football player, while the roommate who pursued her has acid thrown in her face before stumbling into the path of an oncoming truck. The enforcement of the Hollywood production code in 1934 (via the seal of approval provision) meant that even adaptions of popular queer themed novels and plays had to be significantly downplayed. In the case of the 1959 version of Tennessee Williams' *Suddenly Last Summer*, its (implied) homosexual villain Sebastian Venable is rendered all but invisible, and then cannibalized at the hands of his underaged victims for good measure.

In the 1960s, some of the queer representation in mainstream drama films shifted toward a more Elsasser-esque model of Melodrama globally, with films that explored the silent desperation of characters grappling with same sex desires. *Victim* (1961), *The Children's Hour* (1961) and *Advise and Consent* (1962) featured characters subjected to blackmail because of their non-heteronormativity. While these portrayals were largely sympathetic, those who failed to deny their true nature were usually condemned to take their own lives due to their personal shame. The trend of showing homosexual lives as unhappy and unfulfilling continued even as gay characters became more prominently featured. This can be seen in films such as *The Boys in the Band* (1970), a groundbreaking ensemble drama concerning a group of gay men who gather to celebrate a birthday party but end up exploring their emotional scars and personal shame.

Many global and independent queer filmmakers could be seen taking direct inspiration from the Melodrama as a genre throughout the 1970s. The ways in which the melodramatic form can be adapted to explore a wide variety of themes and contexts is illustrated through the work of

the German queer Auteur Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Fassbinder's *Angst essen Seele Auf (or, Ali: Fear eats the Soul)* , produced in 1974, was largely inspired by Douglas Sirk's 1955 film *All That Heaven Allows*. Fassbinder adapted the original film's basic premise of an older widow who falls in love with a younger man of a different class (who in this case is Moroccan Berber) to explore issues of xenophobia, racism, and class in contemporary West Germany. Fassbinder continued to make internationally acclaimed Melodramas throughout the 1970s with films such as *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972) and *Fox and his Friends* (1975) focusing on openly queer characters. Other queer auteurs who were influenced by Melodrama but made use of it in a far more hyperbolic and satirical way include Derek Jarman, with films including *Sebastiane* (1976), *Jubilee* (1978) and *The Tempest* (1979), and John Waters with films including *The Diane Linkletter Story* (1970) *Female Trouble* (1974) and *Desperate Living* (1977). Waters later made his own Sirk homage with the film *Polyester* (1981) about beleaguered housewife Francine Fishpaw, played by drag performer Divine, who is married to an unfaithful pornographic theatre owner. Francine later finds love in the arms of Todd Tomorrow, played by 1950s teen heartthrob Tab Hunter (Hunter would later confirm the consistent rumors of his homosexuality in a 2005 memoir titled *Tab Hunter Confidential*). In the 1980s, several critically acclaimed Queer themed films made significant inroads toward representing queer lead characters. The liberal use of both queer themes and campy Melodrama can be seen in the work of Spanish Auteur Pedro Almodóvar. Almodóvar often contrasts deviant or unusual sexuality with the conventional, such as in his 1980 film *Pepi, Luci, Bom y Otras Chicas del Montón* (or, *Pepi, Luci, Bom)* in which a knitting lesson is interrupted by a lesson in masochism via a "golden shower." He can also be seen confronting ironies around queerness, religion, and morality in films such as *Entre Tinieblas* (or *Dark Habits*)(1983) a dark comedy about a convent of nuns who each confront

their various sins, including a lesbian mother superior.

In the mid 1980s a significant confluence between Melodrama, victimhood, and HIV emerged as filmmakers realized the power that emotional stories featuring characters contracting AIDS held for making a positive change in the public's perception of the virus. The film *Buddies*, considered by many to be the first American film to dramatize the AIDS crisis, was distributed by Newline in 1985. The narrative of the film concerned a friendship between a gay political activist with AIDS and a young gay volunteer assigned to assist him through his final days by an AIDS outreach group. The film provides an emotional portrayal of the daily issues faced by many gay men during the early years of the AIDS crisis, but only received a small limited release in a few arthouse theatres (Benshoff and Griffin, 207). The next, more prominent AIDS, film to emerge was the NBC television movie, *An Early Frost* (1986) which portrayed a homosexual Chicago Lawyer, Micheal Pierson struggling with the news that he has been diagnosed HIV positive. The film brought significant attention to the AIDS crisis due to its being broadcast on a major network; however, it also featured "negative" stereotypes such as the infidelity of Michael's boyfriend Peter, who visited bars and a gay bathhouse while he was working, being presented as a possible reason for his diagnosis. The remainder of the decade saw numerous TV movies about celebrity AIDS deaths as well as features such as *Parting Glances* (1986) and *Longtime Companion* (1989). The artists involved in producing *Longtime Companion* could see the need for a universal story about AIDS that audiences could relate to. This is illustrated in an article from the *Los Angeles Times Calendar*, in which the film's director Norman René is quoted as saying that people needed to see queers having "their day to day intimacies and feelings about one another… that two men and two women can feel the same way about one another as a man and a woman" (Quoted in Benshoff and Griffin 209). This was

echoed by the film's screenwriter, who stated that he felt it important that "we not make people more afraid more afraid with this movie. We wanted to make them feel some sort of common humanity" (Quoted in Benshoff,and Griffin 209). In many ways these aims connect with Brook's theorization of Melodrama as a democratic form that provides a social commentary that is legible to everyone, as well as Eva Illouz' argument that in order for this to happen, stories may need to stripped of some of their idiosyncrasies and connected to broader "grand cultural key scenarios" such as in this case caring for the ones that you love or learning to say goodbye.

1986 saw a boom in independent queer dramas worldwide, with the release of films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette,* and *Parting Glances*. An article detailing the trend in *Variety* praised the films' independent directors and distributors for "decisively addressing cinematic subject matter that's avoided or handled cautiously by the Hollywood majors" (Russo, 209). Unlike the works of iconoclastic auteurs such as Almodovar, Waters or Jarman, their plots were largely sympathetic and conservative, attempting to show how individuals on the LGBTQI spectrum are no different thant their straight counterparts. This can be seen in films such as *Desert Hearts (1986)*. Although the film is considered one of the first widely released films to present a positive portrayal of lesbianism, it follows a largely conventional narrative framework. While its portrayal of a middle-aged woman's lesbian awakening after having left an unsatisfying marriage is "progressive," it is less radical than many films of the decade to follow, in which the non-heterosexuality of principal characters is presented as a given. While these films were modestly successful for independent productions, it was not until the 1990s that Queer themed content would break through to a broader audience, largely as a result of the narrowcasting strategies of cable television networks and the rise in popularity of New Queer Cinema on the indie film circuit.

The 1990s saw a marked increase in the presence of gay characters and gay themed episodes on prime-time network television series. These ranged from shows having specific "gay themed" episodes, to featuring gay recurring characters. Ron Becker argues that this trend emerged as a result of networks reassessing both their programming strategies and their profiles of what constituted a "quality audience" ("Gay-themed Television" 188). He posits that they hoped to reach both "model minority" groups of affluent, educated, gays and lesbians (who were reported to have a disproportionate amount of disposable income) as well as what he terms the "Slumpy" demographic, or Socially Liberal, Urban-Minded Professionals. Becker describes this group as having "liberal attitudes, disposable income, and a distinctly edgy and ironic sensibility" and as being composed of "aging yet still upwardly mobile baby boomers and the youthful twenty and thirty somethings that follow in their wake." ("Primetime Television in the Gay Nineties" 38). In the wake of the debates over political correctness and the rise in popularity of multiculturalist discourses, Becker conjectures that gay themed primetime television was a convenient way for viewers to cultivate "hip" identities and promote their support for the celebration of social differences. This portrayal of homosexual themed content as trendy, edgy and controversial is also seen to a much greater extent in the queer themed independent films which emerged in the same decade.

The term "New Queer Cinema" (hereafter NQC) was first used by critic B. Ruby Rich in 1992 to describe a number of formally creative, audacious and controversial lower budget queer themed features which emerged out of a boom in independent productions in the early 1990s (King 227). Geoff King argues that the filmmakers operating within NQC could be seen as paying homage to the radical gay politics of 1960s underground filmmakers such as Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, Jack Smith and the Kuchar Brothers, while adapting them into more

mainstream narrative formats (229). While this occurred simultaneously to the rise in queer themed content on television as noted by Becker, NQC was markedly different in its approach to representing queer characters. While popular television shows such as *Frasier*, *Friends,* and *The Ellen Show* took a similar assimilationist approach to the queer cinema of the 1980s, promoting acceptance through familiar generic forms, NQC was unapologetic in its aggressive and confrontational politics. In many ways this can be read as a rejection of both the capitalist inclination of muting or deodorizing of gay culture in order to make films more marketable to larger audiences, and the use of the victim mentality throughout the 1980s as a means of gaining a subject position from which to plead for acceptance. The filmmakers made little if any effort to make their characters palatable or accessible to straight, mainstream audiences, and this was reflected in the experimental and fractured generic forms of the films as well. These strategies proved commercially viable and contributed to what Geoff King posits as "One of the most successfully institutionalized parts of the indie sector, with its own well-established network of festivals and distributors" (229). NQC thus demonstrated that there was a sizeable audience for queer centered features and that these could provide fresh and innovative areas for the independent film sector to explore.

The burgeoning success of the indie film market did not escape the attention of the major film studios, who began improving their existing "specialty divisions" and forming and acquiring new ones. These subsidiaries were originally formed for the distribution of foreign films, but now became an important source of funding for independent films. (Ortner 96). While accepting funding tied to major studios may have meant a certain level of compromise on the part of independent filmmakers, working with these divisions still presented a significant opportunity for them to take advantage of. The foregrounding of queer themes and characters in their releases

proved to be a way for these divisions to be profitable while also setting themselves apart artistically and in terms of prestige. Films such as *The Crying Game* (1992 Miramax), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994 Gramercy Pictures), and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999 Fox-Searchlight) also received rave reviews and netted their distributors several academy awards. The use of the melodramatic mode to make commentary on contemporary queer issues can be seen throughout the output of various specialty divisions, both in purely fictional films and in biopics dramatizing the lives of LGBTQI celebrities and historical figures. It has also been referenced as a genre by contemporary queer auteurs working from within these divisions, such as Todd Haynes and Tom Ford. Todd Haynes has experimented with both Melodrama and queer themes throughout his career, taking direct inspiration from Douglas Sirk in his 2002 film *Far from Heaven* (2002). Adapting the basic premise of *All that Heaven Allows* (1955) (the same film which inspired Rainer Werner Fassbinder in the 1970s) Haynes borrows the trope of a suburban housewife falling in love with a younger man and sets his film in the same era as Sirk's Melodrama. In this version however, she is married to a closeted homosexual and her lover is the son of her African American gardener. Through this premise, Haynes explores issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and homophobia in 1950s America. Haynes has similarly experimented with both Melodrama and queer themes throughout his career, with notable examples including *Safe* (1995) (which concerns a housewife's mystery illness and has widely been interpreted as an allegory for the AIDS crisis) and *Carol* (2015) which serves as one of the case studies for my thesis.

Analyses Chapter Overviews

The following chapters analyze the films *Carol* (2015), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *A Single Man* (2005) in terms of both their use of Melodrama and the melodramatic mode and

their impact on contemporary LGBTQI representation. I have selected the order of the chapters in a manner which reflects the first section of my introduction, with the film which most traditionally resembles Melodrama as a genre coming first, the film which reflects genre hybridity coming second, and the film which makes most use of the melodramatic mode (as opposed to resembling it as a genre) coming last.

In chapter 2, I examine how queer cinema auteur Todd Haynes updates the women's picture in his adaption of Patricia Highsmith's 1952 lesbian romance novel, *The Price of Salt*. Haynes applies Melodrama's penchant for subtle and ironic critiques to both the patriarchal rule of the period and contemporary queer issues. In this way, *Carol* (2015) equates the gender roles and expectations of the 1950s and 1960s, which are now generally seen as irrational and outdated, with those which are still held by many about the LGBTQI community to this day. Crucially in this formula is updated from how Melodrama was often used to represent queer figures in the past in that its protagonists are allowed to live happily and openly within their queer identities at the film's ending. However, the film's period setting means that it must make some concessions to the conservative social climate of the Eisenhower Era in order to retain a conclusion which can be considered realistic.

In chapter 3, I analyze the 2005 Ang Lee film *Brokeback Mountain* and examine how it contrasts generic signifiers and themes from both the Western and the Melodrama in its exploration of the impact of toxic masculinity. This is achieved through a focus on how these genres have traditionally been delineated as gendered and through examining how the film critiques and equates the stoic masculinity traditionally associated with the Western with the conservative social values and repressive forces of the Domestic Melodrama. Throughout the chapter I examine how these elements of both genres are portrayed as equally responsible for the

damaging effects of the toxic masculinity and homophobia seen in the film. Finally, I conclude the chapter by considering how the chapter builds upon the "Male Weepies" but is ultimately unable to escape the conservativism inherent within the genre, with both of its protagonists being rendered as victims.

In this chapter 4, I examine how director Tom Ford makes use of the melodramatic mode in adapting Christopher Isherwood's 1964 novel into *A Single Man* (2009). In the film, Ford conflates English Professor George Falconer's grief over the loss of his partner Jim with his and broader society's daily struggles with performativity, ideology and myths. The film examines these through contexts seen in the many classic Melodramas, such as family roles, aging, politics and the status of women. I also consider how Ford makes extensive use of the melodramatic mode in self-reflexively exploring how cinema has been used to represent queerness in the past. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how George is depicted as being released from his obsession with control and rationalizing ideology through the heart attack he suffers at the film's conclusion. I ultimately argue that this ending is not entirely tragic however, as George is depicted as having symbolically steering a young student away from following in his footsteps, and is shown being reunited with Jim shortly before his death.

CHAPTER 2

WIFE, MOTHER, LOVER: RECONFIGURING SOCIAL ROLES IN THE FEMALE MELODRAMA (*CAROL* 2015)

In his 2015 film *Carol,* queer cinema auteur Todd Haynes adapted Patricia Highsmith's 1952 lesbian romance novel *The Price of Salt* using the generic tropes and devices of the popular Female Melodramas contemporaneous to this source material. Haynes' approach, however, updates the formula of the women's picture by using the genre's penchant for subtle and ironic critiques of patriarchal rule to simultaneously critique contemporary queer issues. In this way, Haynes is able to draw on the ironic pathos that is generated by Sirkian Melodrama to equate the gender roles and expectations of the 1950s and 1960s, which are now generally seen as irrational and outdated, with the views which are still held by many about the LGBTQI community to this day. Crucially in Carol, this formula is updated from how Melodrama was often used to represent queer figures in films such as The Children's Hour (1961) and Brokeback Mountain (2005) in that its protagonists are allowed to live happily and openly within their queer identities at the film's ending. However, in order provide a conclusion realistic to period in which it is set, the film's narrative ultimately concedes to a degree to the social mores of the era by rendering Carol's relationship with her daughter uncertain. This disjuncture is purposeful, in that it generates frustration and pathos and serves as a reminder that similar discrimination and injustices can still be seen in society today.

Throughout his career, Haynes has drawn on melodrama both as mode of storytelling and as a genre, complete with its own referenceable style and chronology. The influence of melodrama can be seen more obliquely in his films *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1988)*, Poison* (1991)*,* and *Safe* (1995). However, Haynes also engaged with the Melodrama as a

genre directly in *Far from Heaven* (2002), a quasi-remake of Douglas Sirk's All *That Heaven Allows* (1955), and a 2011 miniseries adaption of the Joan Crawford film *Mildred Pierce* (1945). In adapting *Mildred Pierce,* Haynes stayed true to the James M. Cain source novel by eliminating the added murder subplot and flashback narration which made the original film adaption a Melodrama-Noir hybrid and instead focused on the Melodramatic family dynamics underpinning its narrative.

The approach toward Melodrama seen in *Carol* can be seen as an homage to what Thomas Elsaesser calls the "sophisticated family Melodramas" produced during the 1940s and 1950s. Elsaesser used this label to address what he saw as the ability of some Melodramas to rise above catharsis and reactionism and achieve aesthetic complexity and social commentary. (Klinger, Xii). While this designation is somewhat pejorative of Melodrama as a whole, theorists such as Barbara Creed (1977) argue that it was pointing to the genre's potential for acting as a subversive and revolutionary form during times of cultural struggle. The issue with this type of analysis, as noted by Christine Gledhill in her article "Recent Developments in Feminist Film Criticism" is that it is often highly subjective and based on personal point of view (19). *Carol* premiered on the 17th of May 2015 at the 68th Cannes Film Festival, just one month before the Supreme Court of the United States issued its ruling on Obergefell V. Hodges which granted same-sex couples the right to marry. Given this context, the film can be seen engaging in social commentary, as the issues it addresses regarding marriage, divorce and custody were very much reflected in this case. When the film had its general U.S. release in March of 2016, its narrative would serve as a timely and topical illustration of why this legislation was so necessary and consequential.

Feminist theorists such as Laura Mulvey have suggested moving away from debates over

whether or not Melodramatic texts can be considered progressive and focusing instead on how they function to address the contradictions presented by the way women are positioned within society("Notes on Sirk and Melodrama"(75)). Both Mulvey and Pam Cook proposed focusing instead on women's pictures as cultural objects and examining the enjoyment that female audiences found in these films. Cook similarly proposes that period Melodramas can be reappraised as objects of feminist study and used to formulate strategies for change (248-249). These perspectives are significant in that they attempt to seek the value in texts even when they aren't able to fully escape the conservative nature of the period Melodrama as a form. Christine Gledhill argues that this approach allows theorists to avoid both the trap of regarding films as direct reflections of society and the analysis of whether characters conform to sexist stereotypes or represent liberation. Gledhill proposes that the focus should instead be shifted to how films can "play a cultural and political role outside a self-reflexive theoretical discourse" ("Recent Developments in Feminist Film Criticism," 20). As such, *Carol* can be seen as a valuable text for the ways in which it foregrounds issues of queer representation, despite the compromises that its characters must make toward the end of the film.

Carol embodies aspects of all of these perspectives, in that the film uses Melodrama both to reference the topical issues explored in films of this era, and to bring its critiques to bear on more modern issues of representation, including sexuality and motherhood. In this way he is able to illustrate how far society has come since these films were popular, as well as using the stifling Eisenhower-era conservative milieus within them to generate pathos and frustration at how some attitudes have remained the same.

The narrative of *Carol* is set in 1950s New York and concerns a romantic relationship that develops between Therese, an aspiring young photographer (Rooney Mara) and Carol, an

older housewife (Cate Blanchette) who is in the process of a divorce. The film dramatizes the struggles that the titular character battles with in dealing with her husband and in-laws, and the despair that she feels at the prospect of losing custody of her daughter entirely if she were to openly live her life as a lesbian. The film thus focuses on conflicting and suffocating social roles in a similar manner to the Sirkian Melodramas of the 1950s. This is dramatized in its opening scenes which occur after the affair is discovered and the Aird's have divorced. Therese is shown gazing listlessly through a foggy car window as she travels to a party with friends after having met Carol for drinks at a local bar. As the journey goes on, she sees an excited group of children running down the street, and a couple that strongly resembles Carol and her husband leaving a building. This serves as a reference to the difficult choices which need to be made by the women at the center of the film's narrative. A siren from a nearby train is then intercut with the automated figures on a toy train set as Therese remembers the day she first met Carol. This opening sequence utilizes Therese's point of view to symbolize the way that she and the other characters portrayed in the film are trapped within pre-defined positions in society and limited in their actions in much the same way as figures on a train set.

The theme of family and the suffocating nature of the roles it imposes are central to *Carol* and can be seen expressed throughout the film. Thomas Schatz argues that the family unit serves as an ideal center for the Melodramatic narrative because it carries with it a pre-established structure (whose individual roles, such as father, mother, son daughter, carry large social significance) and is bound to its community socioeconomically through class(153). Schatz argues that this connection means the family can never function as a "natural" autonomous community, and that instead these roles are determined by the larger social milieu. In *Carol* Haynes updates this formula by emphasizing the distinction between biological and chosen

family; a change that is decidedly in line with 21st-century queer theory. While Carol is shown to have strained and at times hostile interactions with both her husband and her in-laws in relation to both her roles as Harge's wife and Rindy's mother, her relationship with her queer best friend Abbie Gerhard (Sarah Paulson) is shown to be far more natural and comfortable. Laura Mulvey posits that the tension wrought by domestic roles and the conflicts they invoke were the key to how the Melodramas of the 1950s functioned, as narrative tension was produced from conflict "not between enemies, but between people tied by blood or love" and touched on "sensitive areas of sexual repression and frustration" (Notes, 75). In *Carol* Haynes uses Carol and Therese's relationships with their friends as a positive foil against these familial conflicts.

The exchanges between Carol and her Husband, Harge (Kyle Chandler), reveal the importance of social roles and appearances in the film, and how they factor strongly into the characters' daily lives and personal autonomy. Harge is first introduced when he arrives to pick up their daughter Rindy and attempts to convince Carol to attend a holiday cocktail party with him. Harge begins by mentioning that their friend Cy Harrison's wife (which Carol quickly corrects to her first name, Jeanette) had asked about Carol when he last saw her. He mentions that he thinks Jeanette would love to see her there, effectively trying to blackmail her into attending. Carol sighs and tells Harge to give Jeanette her best. Seeing that this tactic has failed, Harge reiterates, saying that he would like her to be there. Harge's reference to Cy Harrison's wife (rather than Jeanette) suggests that his own concern lies more with what people might say if his wife failed to attend the party than he is about not having Carol with him. Carol responds that she already has plans, and Rindy innocently and unwittingly reveals that her mother wanted to see "Aunt" Abbie (Carol's best friend and implied former lover) and give her a Christmas present. Harge says to his daughter that she has been seeing a lot of Aunt Abbie with her mother

lately while fixing Carol with a pointed stare. A noise is heard as the view cuts to the Aird's housekeeper busying herself in the kitchen. Carol looks up uncomfortably in the direction of the kitchen and says that she will try and rearrange her plans, to which Harge thanks her, having succeeded in his second attempt at social blackmail. This exchange reveals the ways in which social pressures affect both Harge and Carol, as well as emphasizing Carol's awareness of how having too close of a bond with a female friend might be perceived in their conservative social milieu as potentially homosexual.

A similar dynamic can be seen in the relationship that Therese has with her boyfriend Richard (Jake Lacy). This is first shown when Richard arrives to escort Therese to the department store where they both work. Richard excitedly tells her that he has received more brochures in the mail for their planned trip to France while Therese responds halfheartedly. Throughout the film, the couple argues over Therese's increasing desire to gain a greater degree of personal freedom outside of their relationship and her growing attraction to Carol. This can be seen coming to a head when Richard asks her to spend Christmas with him at his parents' house. Therese declines, saying "That's for families. I'd feel, I dunno…" to which Richard affirms that she is definitely family. Therese quickly changes the subject and tells Richard about her desire to begin building a portfolio and pursuing work as a photographer. Richard counters this by asking her if she has given any more thought to their planned trip. Therese then asks Richard if he has ever been in love with another boy, explicitly connecting her desire for autonomy with her newfound desire for Carol. This is met with derision and confusion from Richard who asks Therese outright if she's in love with a woman and reaffirms that he wants to spend his life with her. He then asks again if she will come to France with him and get married. Therese angrily responds that she is not ready and that "(she) can't just make myself." Unlike Harge and Carol,

Richard does not try to blackmail Therese into being with him, but instead tries to bribe her with the idea of a romantic vacation. Ultimately, he is confused by her response and cannot understand why she is rejecting what he sees as the natural progression for their relationship and social roles as man and wife.

The uncomfortable and controlling nature of the two protagonists' relationships with their male partners stand in stark contrast to the portrayal of their romantic and supportive interactions with each other. This is emphasized when Carol invites Therese for a drive to her home in the country one Sunday afternoon. The journey is punctuated by melodramatic aesthetics, with closeups in soft focus and non-diegetic music giving it a fanciful atmosphere. As Carol's car enters a tunnel, she reaches to turn on the radio, and distorted strains of the ballad "you belong to me" are heard. This music combined with the tunnel's bright lighting serve to create a dreamlike atmosphere as through the two are traveling to another, more accepting world.

The tunnel scene cuts to Carol and Therese stopping to purchase a Douglas Fir Christmas tree further along their journey. This segment is framed in a way which mirrors a pivotal scene from Douglas Sirk's 1955 film *All That Heaven Allows*, in which upper-middle-class widow Cary (Jane Wyman) encounters younger arborist Ron (Rock Hudson) in a tree lot and their attraction is reaffirmed, resulting in her decision to stop caring about society's judgements and pursue a relationship with him. The two scenes are framed as similar both aesthetically and thematically, with Carol wearing a similar fur coat and headscarf to Cary, and the time she spends with Therese ultimately leading to the two beginning a relationship. Therese's use of the camera also serves to link her growing desire for Carol with her aspirations for a career beyond being Richard's wife. In this way, the film equates this era's societal views on the limited roles

of women with its views on homosexual relationships as immoral and portrays both as being backward or outdated.

Pam Cook argues that in the Melodrama, traditionally feminine virtues such as compassion and sensitivity are frequently valued as correctives to the harsh patriarchal control associated with masculinity. Cook argues however that this is a femininity defined as purely maternal, and that it is meant to balance out the more aggressive and destructive aspects of "traditional" masculinity (251). These negative attributes are illustrated by a traumatic scene in which Harge arrives home unexpectedly, ruining the ladies' romantic evening. Harge tells Carol that he has come to pick up their daughter and take her to his parents' house for the holidays, breaking his promise to Carol that Rindy could remain there until Christmas Eve. Harge and Carol continue their argument over this arrangement as he attempts to fix a leak below their kitchen sink. Ultimately, he reveals that the early pickup was all his mother's idea and that there is nothing he can do to change things. Harge thus feels emasculated at having to break his promise and do his mother's bidding, while also having to argue about it with his wife. This is punctuated by a loud clatter (startling Therese in the next room) as Harge abandons the leak with an exasperated "Goddamit!." Ultimately this scene can be read as symbolic of Harge's lack of control over his home, both literally and metaphorically, which would be a major source of humiliation given the gender relations and expectations of that time.

Later in the film, Carol and Therese can be seen attempting to ease the pain caused during their prior evening together as well as affirm their affection for each other through their exchange of thoughtful Christmas presents. Carol purchases a professional camera set for Therese signifying that she takes her desire for a career in photography seriously and standing in contrast to Richard's dismissal of her ambitions throughout the film. Therese's gift to Carol is a

record of the piano piece that she played for her when they spent the evening together. The scene in which she purchases it illustrates the ways in which her friendship with Carol has expanded her understanding of the world around her and her own desires. Therese is shown entering a record store as Richard waits for her outside. As she stands waiting at the counter, Therese notices two women watching her from the other side of the store who are dressed in "butch" clothing, coding them as possible lesbians. While Therese appears intrigued, she quickly leaves the store after the clerk comes back with her order. Therese does not mention these women to Richard, and when he asks whether she found what she wanted, Therese lies and tells him that it was something for someone at the department store. Richard's question is more significant than he is aware of, as it could refer both to the record that Therese lies about in order to hide her budding attraction to Carol, and to the attention she receives from the two women, who signify her growing understanding of her own sexuality and the queerness that can be found in the margins of the world around her.

The difference between "feminine" and "masculine" approaches are further thematized through the Aird's divorce proceedings. These serve to contrast ideas of traditional "morality" with what can really be seen as equitable. After seeing his wife with Therese on Christmas eve (and accurately guessing that she may be beginning another romance) Harge seeks an injunction that denies Carol any access to Rindy and reneges on their agreement to share custody of her. When Carol is informed of this by her attorney she is shocked and asks "can he do this? Is it right?" to which he responds "I don't know if it's right, but it's legal." Carol then asks him on what grounds the injunction was filed, and he sheepishly tries to change the subject, before revealing that Harge and his family are petitioning the judge to consider a morality clause. Carol asks him what this means, and while the attorney states that he won't mince words with her, he

simply states the name Abby Gerhardt and that Harge's attorneys are "alleging evidence of a similar pattern of behavior." His response serves as an example of societal attitudes toward homosexuality at the time, which was seen as so scandalous that it was only alluded to in broad terms when it could not be outright ignored. Carol sums this up with her own response saying "If he can't have me, I can't have her." Thus, while Carol tries to approach her separation from Harge from a middle ground in which they could share custody of their daughter and raise her together, Harge will only accept his family being reunited, or torn apart completely.

In the world of *Carol* the desires of Carol and Therese for something more than the roles and labels offered to them by society are presented as transgressive fantasies, both in the way that they are framed by the characters around them and on the level of mise en scené. Laura Mulvey argues that while the protagonists of the women's picture are usually unaware of the hidden forces which shape their destiny, the distinct visual and aural mise en scené of Melodrama places the audience in a privileged viewing position of knowing the dangers that the protagonists face before they do. As such, they are able to anticipate the ways in which society will turn against and punish them for their transgressions of social and class barriers("Notes on Sirk and Melodrama" 77.). This can be seen in the film through the ways in which the soundtrack and mise en scené are used to portend the dramatic end to the road trip taken by Carol and Therese as they wait out the time before Rindy's custody hearing.

The first sign that the trip will end in heartbreak comes when Therese has a dramatic argument with Richard while readying her luggage. Richard asks Therese if leaving for this trip means the end of their relationship and frames her newfound closeness with Carol as a schoolgirl crush, accusing her of being in a trance. He predicts that Carol will be bored of her within two weeks. This entire argument is presented as highly ironic given that Richard laments having

bought boat tickets to France, having gotten a better job, and having asked Therese to marry him, as if these were not all attempts to make their relationship more exciting or appealing and turn it into the "fantasy" that he is accusing Therese of unrealistically trying to construct with Carol.

The mood as Carol and Therese embark on their trip oscillates between joy, and solemn contemplation. As the women make their escape from the stifling prison of suburbia together, the soundtrack switches to Perry Como's rendition of "Silver Bells" as their car is seen weaving its way through picturesque snow-strewn country roads. This atmosphere does not last long, however, as when Carol asks Therese whether she misses Richard as the two share a meal together, she replies that she has not thought of him or of home all day. This response reminds Carol of her own family troubles and the home that she once had with Rindy, triggering a shift into a more solemn tone. This is marked by a change in both mise en scené and the soundtrack, as a solemn non-diegetic instrumental begins while Carol drives through the night. A news report can be heard on the radio detailing "a warm family get together" as President Eisenhower spends Christmas with his grandchildren. Carol silences the radio before reaching over to adjust the blanket on a sleeping Therese, as if she is comforting herself by remembering the good things she does have.

In the scenes which follow, melodramatic aesthetics are used to create an aura of menace and foreboding that is in stark contrast to the idyllic scenes seen earlier in the film. The viewer is given a strong indication that all is not well when Harge is revealed not to have left for his parents' home in Florida. Instead, he is shown angrily visiting Abby in the middle of the night and demanding to see Carol, having come to pick her up for the benefit of Rindy. When Abby refuses to reveal where Carol is, ominous music swells as Harge leaves in a car driven by a shadowed companion. As Carol and Therese are seen pulling up to a motel, the ominous

soundtrack becomes diegetic with the ballad “But that’s the chance you take” being crooned over the car radio. A further hint as to the treachery the pair face is provided through a sign advertising the name of the establishment as the “McKinley Motel.” This is significant given that it is a name shared by one of only four United States Presidents to have been assassinated while serving his term. When Therese leaves their room to get ice from a machine in the middle of the night, a quick pan of the camera reveals the startling presence of a stranger who offers to help her. This sense of being watched is compounded by the slow movement of the camera from the antique portraits shown decorating their motel room to the two women sitting on the floor as Carol playfully applies Therese’s makeup. The next day, the stranger reintroduces himself as a traveling salesman and offers to help the women with directions as they examine a map.

Carole and Therese spend the final stop of their trip at a motel in the aptly named town of Waterloo, Iowa. The scenes which follow provide an example of what Thomas Elsaesser calls the “Dramatic Discontinuity” of the Melodrama, when scenes with emotional and thematic contrast occur side by side to ensure the maximum affective response from the audience (“Tales of Sound and Fury”60). As a New Year’s Eve broadcast plays over the radio, Carol laments that she and Harge never spend New Year’s together because he always has clients to entertain. Therese replies that she always spends New Years’ alone, in crowds, but that she is not alone this year. The two women then finally acknowledge their mutual romantic attraction and are shown passionately making love for the first time. The next morning Carol is surprised to receive a telegram at the motel office as she is getting ready to check out. She rushes to the car and obtains a handgun from her suitcase, before bursting into the room adjoining theirs while being followed by a shocked Therese. There it is revealed that the traveling salesman the women met previously is in fact a spy hired by Harge to follow them, and that he has sent audio recordings taken from

the previous night to him. The dramatic emotional contrast between these two scenes serves as an example of how tension and pathos are used in Melodrama as the audience is given dramatic payoff through this outcome that the protagonists never could have predicted. Carol's first phone call after finding out about this betrayal is to Abby, again emphasizing her role as chosen family within Carol's life. Abby ultimately flies across the country to pick up Therese and drive her safely back to New York while Carol struggles to deal with the fallout from her relationship with Therese being discovered.

Pam Cook argues that in the women's picture the classical Hollywood narrative is ruptured, as the female protagonist is allowed to become the active subject of desire rather than the object of male desire (254). This desire makes her inaccessible to the male characters around her, and thus presents the threat of her slipping out of patriarchal control. As a result, the protagonist's viewpoint is frequently questioned, with her desires being presented as a problem to be solved, or sublimated as a physical symptom such as an injury or mental illness. In the case of films such as *Dark Victory* (1939) or *Magnificent Obsession* (1954) stars Bette Davis and Jane Wyman are literally stripped of their ability to see. In *Carol* Haynes approaches this process literally by emphasizing how queerness was seen as a mental illness at the time and connecting this viewpoint with patriarchal control.

In *Carol*, Haynes portrays Carol's desires to continue her role as Rindy's mother, escape the control of her husband and have a romantic relationship with Therese as irreconcilable. This is emphasized through the way in which Harge and his parents offer Carol the opportunity to be a part of her daughter's life in exchange for her attending sessions with a psychotherapist who attempts to "cure" her of her queer desires. In this way, her socially unacceptable desire for Therese is positioned as a polar opposite to her desire for motherhood, with patriarchal control

(and denial of her true self) positioned as the required compromise between the two. Carol's struggle with this choice and having to live a lie is most explicitly presented in a scene in which Carol and Harge have lunch at his parent's home following the fallout from the events at the motel.

As the family sits at a formally laid dining room table, the inauguration speech of Dwight D. Eisenhower plays on a television set in the background. Carol mentions that she had expected Rindy to have returned with her aunt and uncle, to which Harge assures her that they should be arriving soon. Harge's father changes the topic of discussion of how much progress Carol has been making with her "doctor." Harge's mother lightheartedly rebuts that she should be, given how expensive her sessions are. Carol responds by pointing out that the man she is seeing is not technically a doctor, but rather a psychotherapist. Both parents reiterate that he is very well regarded and "a Yale man, like your uncle," to which Carol still pointedly insists that this does not make him a doctor. Realizing that she has overstepped, Carol quickly adds that she does like him and that he has been a great help. At this point, a car can be heard arriving marking Rindy's arrival. This scene serves to illustrate the stifling social structures that Carol must grapple with in order to maintain her relationship with her daughter. The entire scene is scored by audio of Eisenhower's speech, serving as a reminder to both Carol and the viewer of the conservative era of American Politics that the characters are occupying. Harge's parents' references to the cost of Carol's treatment, and their willingness to overlook and overstate her therapist's credentials because of his being well regarded and well connected also serve as reminders of the importance with which they view their positions within upper-middle-class society.

Barbara Creed argues that the woman's picture is ultimately a moral tale, and that whatever contradictions the narrative works through, its emphasis rests on placing transgressive

women firmly back within patriarchal ideology where they can be safely controlled (28). This is emphasized through the sudden appearance of the investigator and the way in which Carol initially resigns herself to an unhappy life with Harge in order to be allowed to raise her daughter. Ultimately Carol (and by extension the viewer) assumes this will be her fate, and this is heard in a voiceover in which she reads her final note to Therese. Carol's note states that there are no accidents and that Harge would have found them together in one way or another. She tells Therese to be grateful that this happened sooner rather than later, and while she may seek resolutions and explanations because she is young, she will understand one day. She concludes that she would do anything to make Therese happy, and that in order to do so Carol must do the kindest thing that she can and release her. Barbara Klinger notes that the subversiveness of Melodrama can be measured by how well it succeeds in resolving the ideological tensions that arise in the course of its narrative. While the narrative of *Carol* could have ended with this note and the unresolved passion between Carol and Therese, Haynes' update of the women's film ultimately takes a far more transgressive approach.

Carol is seen attending one final meeting with Harge's lawyers in order to discuss the terms of their divorce. Carol's attorney argues that her psychotherapist is happy with her "recovery" from the events of the winter, and that he has two psychiatrists who are willing to testify that Harge's behavior towards Carol drove her to an emotional break which resulted in "the presumed abhorrent behavior." Harge reacts violently to this, slamming his fists on the table and calling these accusations absurd. Seeing this, Carol decides to end the fighting and delivers an emotional response. She says that ultimately, she wants Harge to be happy, and that while both of them may have failed each other, they gave each other Rindy. She further elaborates that she does not regret her affair with Therese but will regret making a mess of Rindy's life. She

then offers Harge full custody of their daughter, provided she is allowed visitations, but says that she is of no use to her daughter if she is forced to "live against my own grain." She finishes by stating that if they do go to court, things will get ugly, but that she does not think that she and Harge are ugly people.

The film ends with Carol making one last attempt to make contact with Therese, which is revealed to be the bar scene which began the film. As the two catch up, Therese asks Carol if she has seen Rindy, indicating that she still feels guilty over everything that transpired. Carol replies that she has "Once or twice… she's… living with Harge. It's the right thing" although she sighs heavily. Carol then reveals that she has taken a large apartment and was hoping that Therese might come and live with her quickly following this by saying "but you won't… would you?" while laughing nervously. Carol's offer occurring so soon after Therese asks about Rindy has the effect of debasing it slightly, as though she is seeking Therese's company as a remedy for the sadness she feels having essentially lost contact with her daughter. Therese stares at Carol for a few seconds, thinking hard, before responding "no I don't think so." Her solemn contemplation of this question indicates that she is seriously considering agreeing, but ultimately, she decides to prioritize the happiness of both Carol and Rindy. Carol offers to meet Therese later that evening at a restaurant where she is meeting friends if she changes her mind.

Therese is shown attending a house party as she mulls over Carol's offer. She is approached by another young woman who is clearly interested in her, but does not return her advances. This leads to the final scene of the film in which Therese walks through a crowded restaurant before seeing the table at which Carol is seated and being met with a large grin revealing that she has accepted the idea of letting her back into her life. In this way, the film ultimately has a happy and hopeful ending, but, as Geoffrey Nowell Smith argues, in the

Melodrama this is frequently an implausible device, with its appearance marking "a form of an acceptance of castration… achieved only at the cost of repression" (272). Both women are faced with difficult choices in accepting their "happy" endings. Therese decides to continue pursuing a relationship with Carol, despite the guilt that she will be reminded of, being the "cause" of Rindy's separation from her mother. Carol is faced with the choice between seeing her daughter more frequently while living a lie, or providing a positive example for Rindy as she takes a chance at happiness with Therese.

Carol and Therese's decision to embrace their queer identities and their being shown to do so openly and happily is extremely forward thinking given the way in which the Melodrama has been used to represent queer figures in the past. Ultimately however the film's period setting results in it having to concede to a degree of conservatism in order to retain a realistic conclusion. As a result, Carol's relationship with her daughter remains uncertain. In this way, the film fails to fully escape the vein of the traditional Melodrama, in which seeks to restore the"conventional moral vision (of) a particular culture and period"(Cawelti 34). The frustration and pathos that are generated by this disjuncture are important however, as they serve as a reminder that similar discrimination and injustices can still be seen in society today.

In his 2015 film *Carol,* Todd Haynes updates the generic tropes and devices of popular Female Melodramas, utilizing the genre's penchant for critiques of the patriarchy to simultaneously critique contemporary queer issues. In this way, the film is able to generate ironic pathos in a manner similar to the Sirkian Melodrama and use it to equate the views which many today still hold about the LGBTQI community with the outdated and irrational gender dynamics of the 1950s and 1960s. Crucially, at *Carol*'s conclusion, are allowed to live happily and openly within their queer identities marking a distinct departure from the ways in which Melodrama was

used to represent queer figures in the past. Because the film is a period piece, however, its narrative ultimately concedes to a degree to the social mores of the era by rendering Carol's relationship with her daughter uncertain. The frustration and pathos generated by this disjuncture are important, however, as they serve as a reminder that similar discrimination and injustices are still seen in society today.

CHAPTER 3

COWBOYS GET THE BLUES TOO: QUEERING WESTERN MASCULINITY AND THE DOMESTIC MELODRAMA IN *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN* (2005)

The critical and commercial success of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which won three Academy Awards and Four Golden Globe awards and had a global gross of $178 Million, heralded the rise of Mainstream LGBTQI representation at levels far greater than any decades prior. Directed by Ang Lee, the film was adapted from a short story by Annie Proulx originally published in *New Yorker* magazine in 1997. Its narrative concerns an intense sexual and emotional attraction that develops between two male cowboys, Jack (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Ennis (Heath Ledger) after they meet herding sheep in Wyoming, and how their relationship progresses over the course of several decades. In adapting the story to the screen, Lee and screenwriters Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana made use of generic signifiers and themes from both Western films and the Domestic Melodrama. Because of the ways in which the differences between these genres have traditionally been delineated as gendered, combining and juxtaposing them results in a critique of the male stoicism traditionally seen in the Western and equates it with the conservative social values and repressive forces seen in the Domestic Melodrama. Ultimately, this results in both being implicated in the film's harrowing depiction of the impact of toxic masculinity and homophobia across multiple generations of families in the film. While the film uses the melodramatic mode to build upon the themes of the "male weepies" of the 1950s, and the viewer is exposed to multiple perspectives on the two men's relationship, this chapter reveals how *Brokeback Mountain* ultimately fails to escape the trap of rendering both of its protagonists as victims, one literally (of what may or may not have been a hate crime) and the other of his inability to escape his own internalized homophobia.

In a study of 113 reviews of *Brokeback Mountain*, Brenda Cooper and Edward C. Pease found that a majority of reviewers praised the film as a "Universal love story which encouraged the audience to overlook queer Subjectivity" (252). They also noted that many of these reviews framed the film as "peculiar" and drew attention to its popularly being considered a "gay cowboy movie." From these findings, it can be inferred that the way in which the film connects to the "Grand Cultural Key Scenario" of finding true love renders its narrative universally legible. This is also suggested as the preferred reading of the text through the way in which the film was marketed, with its poster prominently featuring the two lead actors (Jake Gyllenhaal, and Heath Ledger) wearing cowboy hats in front of a backdrop of a mountain range in Wyoming with the tagline "Love is a force of nature." As Eva Illouz argues however, rendering stories universal or collective in this manner often comes at the cost of some of the idiosyncrasies present in the original text. In the case of *Brokeback Mountain* and the short story that it was adapted from, this meant the removal of several lines of explicit dialog between Jack and Ennis. In the story, Ennis says to Jack "I mean, here we both got wives and kids, right? I like doin it with women, yeah, but Jesus H.. ain't nothin like this. I never had no thoughts a doin it with another guy except I sure wrang it out a hunderd times thinkin about you"(13). While this may have been excluded from the film for censorship reasons, it largely renders the men's relationships with their wives less of a threat to heteronormative values since it is left more ambiguous whether they are attracted to both genders or are married as a way of hiding their homosexuality. The film also complicates this further by depicting Jack Twist traveling to Mexico and engaging in homosexual affairs with hustlers. The synopsizing of the film as a "gay cowboy movie" raises a similar ambiguity around the pairing of stoic masculinity traditionally associated with the Western film genre, and homosexuality, which has stereotypically been presented as effeminate in the past. The film's

positioning as "peculiar" thus becomes one of safety, as it suggests that its examples of masculine homosexuality are anomalies and far from the norm.

The events of *Brokeback Mountain* begin in the summer of 1963, as Jack and Ennis meet while herding sheep on Brokeback Mountain. This was a turbulent time in American history, with the rumblings of the youth counterculture who rejected the social norms of the prior generation. The year also marked the publishing of Betty Friedan's landmark feminist book *The Feminine Mystique* which many argue sparked the second wave of feminism and the Women's liberation movement. In many ways, the use of the conventions of the Domestic Melodrama and the Western to tell the story of Jack and Ennis' romance and their relationships with their wives and families serves to emphasize the ways in which the gender norms and social roles with which their generation was raised no longer serve them, as both of these forms were falling out of fashion due to their conservative outlooks. As J. Hoberman notes regarding the Western genre, "If the Eisenhower era represented the Western's high noon… in which the U.S. appointed itself global sheriff and the gunslinger supplanted the cowboy as the archetypal Western hero, shadows had lengthened by the time Kennedy reached the White House"(86). The Melodrama underwent a similar revision during this time, with filmmakers such as Douglas Sirk and Vincente Minnelli using the form to produce subtly veiled critiques of Eisenhower America from the mid 1950s onward. The overall shift in social culture is subtly referenced in the film when Ennis and Alma (Michelle Williams) go on a date to a drive-in movie and watch *Beach Party* (1963), the first of a series of "Beach Party" films by American International pictures which specifically catered to a teenage audience by targeting trends and avoiding serious social themes. This film was also significant for the ways in which it challenged the sexual mores at the time, with teenagers implied to be sexually active.

David Rodowick argues that in the domestic Melodrama, patriarchal authority creates and maintains symbolic divisions and oppositions through which the characters' individual identities are formed, both social and sexual. Rodowick notes however, that society in the Melodrama often demands that sexual identity be determined by social identity, and that in this way the social institution of the family both legitimizes and conceals sexuality through the various roles it thrusts upon men and women (husband, wife, mother, father etc.). He argues that at the heart of the genre lies what he calls the "problematic of identity," or the struggle that the characters face in trying to reconcile who they really are with who society expects them to be. Rodowick argues that unlike the Western, in which the narrative is driven by "external conflict and the accumulation of significant action" the Domestic Melodrama relies instead on the "internalization of conflict in a crisis of identification" to build narrative tension(271). All of the principal characters in *Brokeback Mountain* are depicted as struggling to accept the limitations of their sexual and social roles. The ways in which this is portrayed can be seen to evoke various subgenres of Melodrama across gendered lines.

While the stoic and laconic masculine ideal that Ennis, Jack and the other males in the film struggle to live up to in the film is strongly linked to Western signifiers, it is ultimately problematized and thematized across multiple generations in the film in ways that recall the "male weepie" of the 1950s. Thomas Schatz argues that this subgenre typically dramatizes the passing of patriarchal reins from one generation to the next and emphasizes both the patriarch's anxieties and the son's tormented insecurities. While the examples cited by Schatz largely concern suburban middle-class families, *Brokeback Mountain* utilizes this formula in multiple contexts, rural and suburban, blue collar and middle-class as the film shows the progression of the two men's lives. Throughout the film, these struggles with masculinity are also presented in

ways which leave the audience unsure of where their sympathies should lie, as the women in the film are shown as being equally affected by the insecurities of their husbands and fathers.

Ennis and Jack can each be seen to embody separate strains of western masculinity inherited from their fathers. While these rely on similar signifiers such as cowboy hats, boots, leather boots and denim, they are ultimately diametrically opposed in terms of their performativity. These differences are revealed early in the film when the men discuss their upbringings. Jack reveals that his father was a fairly well-known bull rider, but that he "kept his secrets to himself," not teaching him anything and never once coming to see him when he began to ride. He also admits that he doesn't think he could ever please his father, and that this was why he began rodeoing to begin with. While Ennis is initially polite when Jack asks him if he had ever rodeoed, saying that he tried it once in a while, he later admits that he cannot really see the point in "riding a piece of stock for eight seconds." He later reveals that while his own father was a "fine roper" he didn't rodeo much and thought that rodeo cowboys were "all fuckups." Jack reacts indignantly to this, before jumping up in an animated parody of a rodeo cowboy, whooping and hopping from foot to foot as he exclaims "Yee haw! I'm spurrin' his guts out, wavin' to the girls in the stands! He's kickin' to high heaven, but he don't dashboard me, no way!" These exchanges ultimately display the fundamental difference in the two men's personalities. With Jack being the more emotional and forthcoming of the two, the performance of stoic masculinity comes less naturally to him than Ennis. Because of this, he is more dependent on the trappings and signifiers of the western genre and riding horses and bulls is ultimately a way for him to try and prove his masculinity as a traditional "cowboy." This can be seen in the way that he brags to Ennis about his prowess when warned about a horse's low startle point, saying "I doubt there's a filly that could throw me" and the show that he puts on in

controlling the same horse later in the film. Tellingly, Jack is later thrown off of the back of a horse later in the film when he unexpectedly encounters a bear.

The reason that Jack is later drawn to his wife Lureen can be read as an attraction to her similar embodiment of performative masculine traits. Jack meets Lureen (Anne Hathaway) at a rodeo, after he is impressed with her skill at barrel racing and picks up the cowboy hat that she drops while competing. Later, at the local bar, she flouts gender conventions further, making the first move by approaching Jack and asking "what are you waiting for cowboy? A matin' call?." Lureen is briefly shown to doubt her self-confidence as the two are shown making out in her car after leaving the bar. She says to Jack "You don't think I'm too fast do you?" to which he replies "fast or slow, I just like the direction you're going." The trouble that Jack will have with his future father in law is foreshadowed when Lureen says that the reason she is in a hurry is because her father expects her home at midnight, revealing that even women as confident as her cannot fully escape patriarchal control.

Ennis' laconicism and stoicism reflects the personality traits traditionally associated with the heroes of the Western genre. Jane Tompkins argues that the Western genre's mistrust of language has extended beyond philosophical musings to become "codified and sanctioned in the way several generations of men have behaved verbally toward women in American society"(59). She notes silence simultaneously establishes dominance and protects the silent one from inspection and possible criticism. In many ways the comfortable silences between Ennis and Jack as they spend time in nature illustrate their growing realization of their affinity for one another. These also display a unique aspect of melodramatic mise en scené, as the music accompanying the idyllic natural scenes comes to substitute for the emotions and queer connections that neither possesses the vocabulary to express. Unlike the inner strength that this is supposed to represent

in the Western protagonist, Ennis' silence is revealed to be purely out of defense, as a means of keeping himself as far in the closet as possible. During their first summer together his talkativeness when speaking about his childhood causes Jack to smile. When Ennis asks why, Jack replies "Man, that's more words than you spoke in the past two weeks." Ennis replies "Hell that's the most I've spoke in a year.," signaling the closeness of the bond that is forming between the two men.

The use of silence as a means of flying under the radar as queer can later be seen in a scene in which Jack and Lureen attend a dance with another couple, Randy Malone and his wife Lashawn. Lashawn is incredibly talkative the entire evening, while her husband sits in silence, glancing furtively but pointedly at Jack, to which he looks away uncomfortably. At one point Lashawn jokingly complains to Lureen that neither of their husbands seem to be interested in dancing, to which Lureen replies "it's funny isn't it? Husbands don't never seem to wanna dance with their wives. Why do you think that is Jack?" Jack gruffly responds that he has never thought about it before asking Lashawn to dance (ostensibly as a means of escaping Randy's gaze). After the dance is over, Randy and Jack are seen sitting on a bench outside of the venue and waiting for their wives to come out so they can leave. Jack attempts to make small talk, awkwardly asking Randy why wives always seem to want to powder their noses after parties even though they're going straight home. Randy replies that even if he wanted to know "(he) couldn't get a word in with Leshawn long enough to ask." Randy then turns the topic of conversation to a cabin owned by a mutual friend. Looking pointedly at Jack he says that they should visit it one weekend and "drink a little whiskey, fish some, get away, you know?." Jack does not respond, instead staring straight ahead of him as Lashawn is heard talking loudly in the background while she and Lureen exit the building. This scene serves to illustrate the surreptitious nature in which

queer men would have needed to proposition other men at this time, with many of them using their wives as a beard for hiding their homosexual proclivities from prying eyes. Aside from Randy's pointed glances, the only reason the viewer becomes aware that he is propositioning Jack at all is because they have seen Jack and Ennis use these same excuses on their wives earlier in the film as a reason for their being together.

Later in the film, Ennis' reticence is ultimately revealed as stemming from a traumatic childhood incident. In explaining why he believes they cannot be together; Ennis tells a story to Jack about two men who were living together on a ranch in his hometown. This is accompanied by a flashback of a man walking with two young boys, his arms resting on their shoulders. Ennis notes that the two men were a joke around the town as everyone knew about their homosexuality, but that one day, one of them was found dead in a ditch after someone had beaten him with a tire iron, spurred him up and dragged him around by his penis until it was torn off. He then reveals that his father had taken him and his brother to see the results of this when he was nine years old, revealing that Ennis was one of the young boys as the desecrated corpse is shown in flashback. Ennis ultimately concedes that "if you can't fix it, Jack you've got to stand it." When Jack asks for how long, Ennis responds with a Western related metaphor "for as long as we can ride it. And this one's got no reins." In this way, the emotional constraints that western masculinity places on the men are revealed to be similar to how the women of Melodrama are trapped in middle-class femininity.

The struggles that Jack and Ennis endure within masculine social positioning can be seen to extend into their roles as husbands and fathers and are similarly illustrated through other male characters in the film. Jack's relationship with Lureen is shown to be marred by his difficulty in maintaining autonomy under his domineering father-in-law. This is first seen when Lureen's

parents arrive at their home to visit after she has given birth to the couple's first son. Her mother, Fayette proudly announces that she has bought 120 cans of formula for the baby, to which her father, L.D., responds that he has forgotten them in his car. As they gather in close to see the baby, L.D. dismissively tosses his keys to Jack, saying "Rodeo can get em.'" Fayette then says that she can "already see who little Bobby looks like" and L.D. congratulates Lureen saying "Good job little girl." He then responds to his wife, saying that the baby is the spitting image of his grandpa. Turning to look at Jack, who is standing in the doorway, L.D. repeats this, saying "Isn't he just the spittin' image of his grandpa?" Jack smiles and nods, but when the Newsome's all turn their attention back to the baby he lowers his head dejectedly and turns to leave the room. This exchange sets up the dynamic that Jack has with his in-Laws, in particular his father-in-law, who see him as nothing more than the means toward a grandson.

This attitude is also reflected years later as Jack spars with L.D. for the reigns of patriarchal control over the family's thanksgiving dinner. These scenes provide examples of what Thomas Elsaesser calls "overdetermined objects" or melodramatic props which allow for aggressive feelings to be worked out by proxy (56). The dinner scene is introduced with a closeup shot of Jack ladling gravy over a large, dressed turkey sitting on an ornate silver platter, his gaudy, decorative western belt buckle visible to one side. This serves to equate the showiness of Middle-Class suburbia with Jack's need to perform and reaffirm his masculinity with western signifiers. Jack carries the platter over to the formally dressed dining table at which his family sits in the next room, and picks up a carving fork and knife, only to be interrupted by his-father in-law. L.D. grabs the implements from Jack, saying "Whoa there Rodeo. Stud duck do the carving around here." Jack brushes this off, replying "You bet L.D. I was just saving you the trouble" and taking his seat while sharing a pointed glance with Lureen. A television can be seen

loudly playing a football match in the background. When Lureen notices that her son is distracted by the football, she tells him that if he doesn't eat his dinner she will turn off the television. When he responds indignantly, Jack moves to support Lureen, telling Bobby to finish his meal before he can watch the game, and crossing the room to turn off the television. Seeing this, L.D. lays down the carving knife and walks across the room to turn the television back on. Lureen angrily turns to glare at her father to which he responds "Hell, we don't eat with our eyes. You want your boy to grow up to be a man don't you daughter. Boys should watch football?." He then picks up the knife and resumes carving. Jack then gets up and once again turns off the television. When L.D. moves to turn it back on, Jack yells angrily at him "You sit down you old son of a bitch!" More calmly, he says "This is my house. This is my child. And you are my guest. Now you sit down before I knock your ignorant ass into next week." L.D. then returns to his place at the table. Hearing this, Lureen grins slightly before assuming a more measured expression. Jack sighs, before standing and taking over the carving of the turkey. In this scene the television and carving knife serve as overdetermined objects which represent the power struggle between Jack and L.D. While Jack initially resolves to let L.D. carve the turkey and be the "stud duck" of the family, he ultimately changes his mind when he sees that L.D. wants to teach Bobby the same toxic masculinity that Jack himself has been hurt by his entire life, as symbolized by the television. This causes Jack to seize the means of patriarchal control and reassert himself in his roles as Lureen's husband and Bobby's father by finishing the carving of the turkey.

While Jack is never shown interacting with his own father, John, in the film, the viewer is given a sense of their difficult relationship through the way that Jack talks about him with other characters. Despite this, Jack remains devoted to his father, mentioning to Ennis that he may go

back to the Twist family ranch to help him through the winter. The coldness of John is ultimately confirmed at the end of the film when Ennis visits Jack's parents after his death. As Ennis offers to scatter Jack's ashes on Brokeback Mountain Jack's mother watches him silently, before switching her gaze worriedly over to John she waits for his response. He responds that he knows where Brokeback Mountain is, and that Jack thought he was "too goddamn special to be buried in the family plot." He reveals that he and his wife know who Ennis is, and that Jack had spoken to them about "some half-baked notion the two of you was gonna move up here, build a cabin, help run the place." Spitting heavily in a cup as if to show his disdain for this idea, he continues, saying that Jack eventually had another man who was going to come up to the ranch with him in the Spring and help him to tend to it after he split up with Lureen. He then notes that "Like most of Jack's ideas. Never came to pass." At this, Jack's mother places her hand on Ennis' shoulder and tells him that she kept Jack's room as it was in childhood, and that he is welcome to go up to it if he would like. There, Ennis finds a shirt that he thought he had lost on Brokeback Mountain tucked inside of the same shirt that Jack had worn on that day. Bringing the shirts back with him into the kitchen, Ennis is given a paper bag for the shirts by Jack's mother as John says coldly in the background "We got a family plot and he's going in it." Hearing this, Jack's mother clutches her hand to her chest emotionally as Ennis turns to leave. This scene provides context as to the toxic and controlling patriarchal masculinity which Jack grew up with. In many ways, the way in which western masculinity is shown as having kept Jack trapped in the closet can be compared to the way in which his mother is trapped in a loveless and oppressive marriage due to social expectations as in the Melodrama. This is evidenced by the way that she is too nervous to express her opinion when Ennis requests Jack's ashes, and by how hard she works to keep her reactions controlled and measured in front of her husband. While it is fairly safe to assume that

Jack's parents were aware of his homosexual inclinations, it can also be assumed that the only reason John mentions that Jack had found a new man to care for the ranch with him is to hurt Ennis, as he would not appear to approve of any of these relationships. By refusing to pass Jack's ashes on to Ennis, John ensures that he exerts control over his son even in death, and that Jack is ultimately unable to escape the toxic patriarchal line that has continued for generations.

The silent struggles which Alma and Lureen face as a result of being married to closeted menial laborers are depicted in a way which closely recalls both the visuals and the themes of the Domestic Melodramas and Women's pictures of the 1950s. While Ennis and Jack's decades long romance forms the central narrative of *Brokeback Mountain*, it is the labor of their wives which enables them to maintain their transient and leisurely lifestyles and maintain their secret relationship. In this way they can be read as being exploited by their husbands both emotionally and for their labor (Tinkcom, 72).

While Ennis' first mentions his fiancée Alma to Jack as they lounge around the fire on the first morning of their summer on the mountain, she is only brought up once more, as a reason for why Ennis may not return the following summer as the two men say their goodbyes. Ennis then walks into a nearby alley and dissolves into an emotional fit, screaming obscenities when a person nearby attempts to come to his aid. In the scene which follows, Alma is introduced into the film on the day of her wedding to Ennis. The editing in this sequence serves to illustrate a number of important points as to the role Alma comes to play in Ennis' life throughout their relationship in the film. The scene is transitioned via a split edit, as audio of the priest concluding his intonation of the Lord's prayer is heard over Ennis' collapsed silhouette in the alley before the visual cuts to a closeup of him in his wedding suit saying the lines " lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" with the minister. The film then cuts to a wide shot of the

entire wedding party as they conclude the prayer and Ennis chastely kisses his bride after an awkward joke from the minister "You may kiss the bride. And if you don't I will." The juxtaposition between the extreme emotion that Ennis expresses at his having had to part with Jack is starkly contrasted with his comparative lack of emotion in completing his vows to Alma. This, along with the focus on the line about avoiding temptation and evil serve to confirm to the viewer Ennis' motives for the marriage, as he hopes to try and overcome his attraction to other men, and, failing that, to divert attention away from it. While a montage which follows of the couple sledding in the snow and going to a drive-in movie together reveal the affection that the couple do share for each other, Ennis is never able to fully commit to Alma, leaving her feeling unfulfilled in her role as his wife.

The subsequent scenes of the Del Mar's married lives are depicted visually in ways which recall the Domestic Melodramas of the 1950s. This can be seen in the ways that the couple are framed by the doorways, dividers, and windows of their dwellings, emphasizing their suffocating closeness, and serving as a metaphor for the ways in which they feel imprisoned by their social roles. While Ennis comes and goes from their home as a result of his transient work as a menial laborer, Alma is forced to stay at home, cooking, cleaning and watching as life goes by through windows panes and doorways. As the film progresses and Alma gains self-confidence, she slowly begins to assert herself and demand more from her life with Ennis. This includes moving to an apartment in town so that she and the girls can have a more active social life and getting a job at a grocery store to supplement their income. While Ennis and Alma are shown to clash frequently, Alma is ultimately portrayed in a sympathetic light.

Thomas Elsaesser argues that in the Melodramas of Sirk and Minneli, pathos is created through a liberal mise en scené in which the audience is encouraged to assess situations from

different points of view and understand the attitudes displayed by the various characters (64). A similar impulse can be seen in *Brokeback Mountain*, as while sympathy is encouraged toward the deeply closeted Ennis, and his longing for a life with Jack, the viewer is also shown Alma's frustration at Ennis' lack of affection toward her and his general inconsideration of her needs beyond her role as his wife. A prime example of this can be seen when Ennis arrives unexpectedly at her place of work to drop off the girls because he has been called to work, showing a complete disregard for Alma's own job as she begrudgingly resolves to call her sister to babysit. This contrasting of viewpoints is later used to extreme emotional effect when Jack and Ennis reunite for the first time. While Alma expresses curiosity as to her husband's friend Jack when Ennis receives a postcard, she is only told that they were "fishing buddies" in the past and is unaware of the deeper meaning behind the exchange. Elsaesser argues that these types of melodramatic situations activate the viewer's sense of participation, as there is a desire to make up for the emotional deficiency, and impart awareness, or "warn the heroine of the perils looming visibly over her"(66). The audience is stripped of this notion on the day that Jack arrives at the apartment for the visit. Ennis is seen enthusiastically running out to greet him with a hug and, after furtively glancing around, pulling Jack into a secluded spot and kissing him. This scene is accompanied by a triumphant musical cue signaling the men's joy. Simultaneously, the scene cuts to a view of the front door to the Del Mar apartment opening as Alma spots the two with a confused and devasted expression of her face. The passion of the two men is then contrasted with the silent desperation of Alma as she walks back into her kitchen and tries her best to act as if she has no idea what just occurred. The desire to warn the characters of what we as viewers know is now also split and shown from a different viewpoint, as Ennis becomes the one who is unaware that his wife knows about his affair.

Despite finding out about Ennis' affair, Alma remains married to Ennis for several years, and is shown to have moved with him and their now pre-teenage girls to a new home. This again signals a shift in Alma's sense of self-worth as she berates Ennis for not wanting to attend their church social with her on a Saturday night. The final straw in their marriage comes when the couple are about to have sex and Alma expresses reservations about not using birth control. Ennis replies that if she doesn't want any more of his kids he would be happy to leave her alone. She responds that she would have them if Ennis would support them. This exchange serves not only to highlight one of the key issues that the Women's Liberation Movement was grappling contemporaneously (the film's script lists this scene as occurring in 1974) but also to confirm to Alma that Ennis does not value her as a person beyond her roles as wife and mother. This argument is immediately followed by the scene of their day in divorce court which is framed and presented in similarly to the day of their wedding, with the parties supporting Ennis and Alma standing in the same positions as the bridesmaids and bridegrooms and the judge standing in the place of the minister. Closeups of Ennis serve to illustrate that he is equally uncomfortable with being at the center of attention at both events.

Alma eventually marries the manager of the supermarket that she worked at, and is shown to be living in a middle-class home far nicer than any she had shared with Ennis. This shift in circumstances corresponds with her finally being confident enough to emotionally confront him about his affair with Jack Twist. Similar to her initial discovery of the affair, this scene forces the viewer to consider multiple viewpoints and is filled with conflicting emotions. Alma chooses to reveal that she knows about the affair as she and Ennis stand alone in her kitchen after sharing thanksgiving dinner with their family. She tells Ennis that she tricked him once by tying a note to his fishing line, only for it to be in the exact same place when he

returned. She then expresses her disgust, stating “Jack Twist? Jack nasty!” to which Ennis reacts with violent rage, viciously grabbing her arm and telling her that “(she) don’t know nothing about it.” Alma threatens to scream for help to which Ennis Responds that he will “make her eat the fucking floor” if she does. Alma then screams in terror multiple times for Ennis to get out as he storms out of the house in a rage. This scene presents the viewer with a number of conflicting emotional cues, as while Alma is finally able to confront Ennis about his affair and neglect of her and their daughters, she does so through homophobic remarks which suggest that we should feel sympathetic toward Ennis. There is also the shame that Ennis experiences at having been discovered, and the problematic situation of his asserting his dominance over Alma by threatening violence, as well as her terror at this response. Finally, there is the aspect of his having stormed out of the house and past his daughters and their stepfather who had no idea what had transpired. This results in an emotional scene which reflects the complicated nature of the relationships in the film, and the ways in which all of its characters may equally be perceived as victims.

The tragic events which conclude *Brokeback Mountain* reflect an important ideological function of the Melodramatic form. Critics such as Laura Mulvey argue that the subversiveness of a Melodramatic text can be measured by the number of contradictions that their narratives bring to the surface of the text, the way in which they are presented aesthetically, and how these are either resolved or left open upon a film’s ending (“Notes”75). The manner in which Jack’s death is presented in the film is both ambiguous and contradictory, in that what Ennis (and the viewer) are told upon finding this out, and what the viewer sees tell two different stories, leaving the viewer unsure which to believe. Upon seeing that his postcard has been returned, Ennis makes a phone call to Jack’s wife Lureen to find out what happened to him. Lureen impassively

tells Ennis that Jack was pumping a flat tire on a backroad when it exploded and the rim of the tire smashed into his face, breaking his nose and Jaw. She notes that this knocked him unconscious on his back and that by the time a passerby arrived he had drowned in his own blood. As she finishes recounting this story, the view cuts to a scene in which Jack is in fact murdered in a homophobic attack similar to the one that Ennis had witnessed as a child and recounted earlier in the film. It is never made clear however whether this is an alternate flashback of what actually occurred, with Lureen telling Ennis a carefully rehearsed lie, or simply what Ennis imagines having really happened, with his internalized homophobia trying to sublimate for or justify this cruel twist of fate. Laura Mulvey notes in her analysis of the Sirkian Melodrama of the 1950s that it is as if "having a female point of view dominating the narrative produces an excess which precludes satisfaction" ("Notes"79). In *Brokeback Mountain* this is clearly the case for the queer point of view and a happy ending, as regardless of what actually happened to Jack, he was robbed of even the attempt to even try and have a happy ending. Ennis is similarly prevented from ever telling Jack how he really felt about him and is portrayed as having such intense internalized homophobia that it unlikely he would even attempt to find happiness with someone else. This is literalized in the final scene of the film, as he places the couple's two shirts, along with a postcard featuring Brokeback Mountain firmly back in his closet.

Brokeback Mountain engages in a critique of the male stoicism traditionally seen in the Western which in turn equates it with the conservative social values and repressive forces seen working to oppress women in the Domestic Melodrama. Ultimately, all of these generic tropes are shown to be equally responsible for the harrowing impact of toxic masculinity and homophobia seen across multiple generations in the film, as well as the tragic endings that come

about for its protagonists, with both the male characters and he female characters facing different forms of emotional oppression. While the film builds upon the themes of the "male weepies" of the 1950s and portrays the lasting effects of toxic gender norms in numerous different contexts, the film ultimately renders both of its queer protagonists as victims. Whether Jack is the victim of a hate crime, or a cruel twist of fate, he is still denied the respect of having his last wishes carried out in the manner that he requested. Ennis is similarly resigned to a life in the closet, filled with regret at having lost the only person he ever truly loved.

CHAPTER 4

"THE EXPRESSION OF A PREDICAMENT": IDEOLOGY AND GRIEF IN *A SINGLE MAN* (2009)

A Single Man (2009), adapted by Tom Ford and David Scearce from a 1964 novel by Christopher Isherwood, follows a day in the life of George Falconer, an English professor who is struggling to find meaning in his life following the loss of his partner Jim in a car crash. The film is set in 1962, taking place a month after the Cuban Missile Crisis. Through the use of the melodramatic mode, Ford is able to conflate one man's struggle with grief with his and broader society's struggles with performativity, ideology and myths. The film explores these in various contexts explored in the classic Melodrama, including politics, aging, family roles and the status of women. It also modernizes the form by using the melodramatic mode to comment on issues of academia and self-reflect on past filmic representations of queer individuals. Ford depicts George as trying to overcome his obsession with analysis, control and rationalizing ideology. He is able to approach this task through his encounters with Kenny, a young student who is representative of a young, unjaded version of George himself. Ultimately, George's release from ideology and grand narratives is symbolized by his death from a heart attack at the film's conclusion. This ending is not entirely tragic however, as George is depicted as having symbolically steered Kenny away from following in his footsteps, and is shown being reunited with Jim shortly before his death.

The film begins with two sequences which illustrate its protagonist's struggles with ideology and grief. First, the viewer is shown an unidentified man who is seemingly drowning in an immense body of water. When this segment reoccurs later this man is revealed to be George, symbolically struggling to survive under the weight of society's judgements and expectations.

The sequence is accompanied by melodramatic music that quickly builds to a dramatic sound somewhat like a teakettle about to overboil and accompanied by loud, rapid, heartbeats. This transitions to the sound of brakes screeching and a car crashing as the aftermath of a fatal accident is shown. George is seen walking through snow toward the scene of the accident before lying down beside the corpse of his partner, Jim. George leans over and kisses the corpse before jolting awake in alarm. Despite the anxiety brought about by his nightmare, George touches his mouth and smiles at the memory of Jim's lips on his. These sequences which open the film establish George's seemingly incurable grief and his inability (and unwillingness) to find happiness without Jim. In this way, George is shown to be in league with what Thomas Elsaesser calls "Sirk's most impressive characters" whose pathos appears tragic because "they take on suffering and moral anguish knowingly, as the just price for having glimpsed a better world and having failed to live in it" (1987, 67). This idea is illustrated through George's narration as he describes his relationship with Jim and their differing worldviews while he prepares for the day. George states that he "used to want to punch Jim sometimes in the morning, he was so happy. I always used to tell him that only fools greet the day with a smile, that only fools could possibly escape the simple truth that now isn't simply now. It's a cold reminder. One day later than yesterday, one year later than last year, and that sooner or later it (death) will come." Having lost Jim, George would now seem resolute to stay in this depressive mindset for the rest of his life.

George experiences a series of flashbacks throughout the film which serve to conflate his grief at having lost Jim with his inability to disregard the ideologies and judgements of society. The differences in the two men's outlooks on the middle-class milieu that surround them are revealed in scenes such as the first time that George shows Jim their new Mid-century Modern house. As Jim closes in for a kiss, George tells him to stop it, saying "I don't think you're quite

ready for life in a glass house. Jim teasingly replies “Drapes old man” to which he adds “You’re the one who’s always saying we’re invisible.” George then says that “that’s not exactly what I meant.” The style of the couple’s home serves as a stark contrast to the more traditional decor favored by their neighbors and George’s friend Charly. This can be read as a reflection of how unconventional their homosexual lifestyle would appear in the film’s 1962 setting, and could also be seen as being influenced by George’s position as an English professor, where he interacts with various students involved in the burgeoning countercultural movement that began in the 1960s. Despite this, George is shown to be highly conscious of the impression that he makes on his neighbors, and unable to escape his concerns about their judgments.

A flashback later in the film reveals Jim’s contrasting attitude as the two discuss the differences between their lives of and those of their dogs. Jim recounts a story in which their neighbor Susan came over to talk to him and one of her children appeared waving a toy gun. He then tells George that when their dog walked over and peed all over the boy, he had to pretend to be upset, despite the children having terrorized the dogs in the past. Jim expresses his jealousy of their pets, as they can do whatever they want. He then suggests that George could learn something from the dogs, as they do not stay up all night worrying and just live in the moment.

The idea of the suburban, nuclear family is used throughout the film to represent conservative Eisenhower era myths and ideologies. A significant example of this is the scene witnessed by George from his bathroom window early in the film, in which a wide array of these myths are thematized and satirized. Looking out the window to identify the source of an irritating banging noise, George sees the young neighbor girl Jennifer banging on an old bathroom scale with a hammer. Her mother, Susan, appears, ostensibly to ask her to stop making a racket. This can be read as a commentary on both the sexist gender dynamics and unfair patriarchal

behavioral standards thrust upon women at this time, as Jennifer destroys a symbol of this control while her mother tries to make her quieter and more subservient. The attention of both are quickly distracted however when Jennifer's older brother, Tom, appears to have found something with a metal detector that he is using to comb their lawn. Jennifer and her younger brother, Christopher rush over and even Susan gets caught up in the excitement of digging up what Tom has found. This can be seen as a metaphor for the Golden Age of capitalism of the postwar period, in which workers were encouraged to work hard and find their fortune while participating in the economy by contributing to urban sprawl.

Family Patriarch Mr. Strunk appears with his hat and briefcase and is clearly agitated by all the commotion. Susan walks over and attempts to pacify him, but only succeeds in annoying him further. The view then cuts to Christopher, dressed in Indian warpaint and a headband with feathers and a coon tail dangling from it, as he picks up a butterfly from a nearby flower. As the Strunk's argument concludes, the live butterfly becomes is suddenly dead in Christopher's hand. He gleefully mashes the remains between his hands and releases them to the wind. The fate of the butterfly ultimately reflects the falsity of the American dream, with it dying just as his parents finish their argument, signaling that all is not as idyllic as it seems. Christopher's destruction of it is indicative of the toxic masculine ideals being forwarded in the Eisenhower era, with his play clothes evoking both the frontiersman and the native of the western films which were popular at the time. George himself is not depicted as entirely separate from this world, as when Susan goes to throw the remains of the scale away, she spots him watching her from atop his toilet and waves, laughing when he ducks from view and echoing George's statement to Jim about living in a glass house.

Another example of the "nuclear" family being displayed in an ironic fashion occurs

when George has a conversation with his coworker, Grant, regarding the articles he gave him on bomb shelters. The sequence which follows can be seen as satirizing what Slavoj Žižek calls the "pleasurableness" of mainstream ideology (Fiennes). Žižek argues that to be liberated from ideology hurts because it means to be separated from one's spontaneous sense of wellbeing. As Grant describes how he has hired three separate contractors to work on a shelter for his family, George imagines a hyper-saturated scene of Grant standing with his wife and family in a cramped cinderblock room alongside a goat, a cow and two chickens. The satirical juxtaposition of the Melodramatic nuclear family with the very real nuclear threat presented by the cold war can be seen as a metaphor for the perceived assault on middle-class American values at this time. As such, the shelter that Grant is building is presented as a means of protecting both their literal safety, and the sense of wellbeing that mainstream ideology and their way of life provides them.

Throughout the film, George expresses great contempt for those around him who conform to what he believes are the myths that they are exposed to every day. He voices this to Grant, saying "Most of these students aspire to nothing more than a corporate job, and a desire to raise Coke-drinking, TV-watching children who as soon as they can talk chant TV Jingles and smash things with hammers." With this description, George refers to the same bourgeois ideologies described by Roland Barthes, which attempt to obscure their origins and portray themselves as the way things have always been (1972). George's derision of these myths underpinning society is further reflected in the text that he chooses to teach to his students. Aldous Huxley's *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* deals with many of the same themes as *A Single Man*. Its plot concerns an aging millionaire, Jo Stoyte, who is growing conscious of his mortality and gathers together a group of characters who each represent a different view on life. In many ways Stoyte's contemplative attitude reflects the same struggles that George faces in

interacting with those around him and accepting that there are some grand narratives which cannot be rationalized.

In lecturing about the novel to his class, George is asked about a line in the novel that a student perceives as being antisemitic. A character in the novel states that the stupidest text in the bible is "They hated me without a cause" and the student wonders if perhaps Huxley was referring to Hitler hating the Jews. George promptly responds that Huxley was not an anti-Semite and that the Nazis did in fact have a cause for hating the Jews: Fear. George asks his students to consider a different minority that can go unnoticed if necessary, ostensibly referring to his own homosexuality. George states that a minority is only thought of as such when it constitutes a threat to the majority, and that if it is somehow invisible then the fear it generates is even greater. George then decides to direct the lecture away from Huxley and toward fear itself. He states that fear is how "politicians peddle policy and how Madison Avenue sells us things that we don't need." He also references the fear of communism and the looming Cuban Missile Crisis, echoing his earlier conversation with Grant. Finally, he shifts onto a personal note, noting the "fear that we're useless and that no one cares what we have to say." This segment serves to equate the various forms of ideology being critiqued in the film and cites fear as the sole reason for their existence.

George's interactions with his friend Charly (Julianne Moore) reveal her similarly pessimistic attitude, and how she sees the ideologies which inform their middle-class milieu as having failed her. She sympathizes with George over his loss of Jim, saying that she still thinks about her ex-husband Richard every day and bemoans the fact that she "did everything the way I was supposed to and all I have to keep me company is a bottle of gin." She resolves that her new year's resolution is to have "no more talk about awful ex-husbands or children who don't give a

damn." George more sedately and ambiguously accedes to "let(ting) go of the past, completely entirely and forever." Charly argues that it must be easier for him however, as he has "a job and a life." In this way, Charly's narrative can also be compared to that of a Sirkian housewife, however, rather than being rescued by an ironic happy ending, she is instead portrayed as trying to supplant the ideologies that have failed her with new ones by attempting to appear younger and adopting the fashions of a new era.

Despite her dissatisfaction with where conforming to societal expectations has gotten her, Charly can still be seen holding on to some of the prejudices and conservative values of the milieu in which she lives. This can be seen when she compares George's relationship with Jim to her own relationship with her ex-husband. Charly grievously offends George when asks "Don't you ever miss this? What we could have been to each other? Having a real relationship and kids?" and implies that Jim was "really just a substitute for something else." George leaps up and angrily asks her what is so real about her relationship, reminding her that while her ex-husband left her after nine years, he and Jim were together for sixteen**.** Charly's callous disregard for George and Jim's relationship is indicative of the conservative social attitudes that the counterculture was beginning to rally against during this period. These are also reflected in the behavior of Jim's family after his death, as George only finds out about the accident because a sympathetic cousin calls him against his aunt and uncle's wishes. He also advises George not to travel to the funeral because the service is only for family. Ultimately, this argument between Charly and George serves as a commentary on the hypocrisy of homosexual relationships having to be lived in relative obscurity or "invisibility" for fear of the danger or shame they might face upon being discovered; while dysfunctional heterosexual relationships were allowed to continue, provided they disguised themselves beneath a veneer of suburban bliss.

Melodramatic framing and mise en scené are used throughout the film. Charly and her home in particular are framed in ways which evoke a Sirkian Melodrama. In one of her calls to George, she is seated before an array of mirrors and is reduced to the image of a tremendous and distorted eye as she uses makeup to paint on an elaborate and trendy 1960s cat-eye. The symmetry and use of reflections in this scene recall Douglas Sirk's use of vanity tables in films such as *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) and *There's Always Tomorrow* (1956) in which heroines are contained within the frames of their mirrors in ways which symbolize how they feel trapped within their social roles and their middle-class lifestyles (Rappaport). For Charly's character in *A Single Man*, the mirror reflects her obsession with youth and beauty, as she willingly objectifies herself while getting ready for the evening. This idea is furthered by George's flirtatiously referring to her as kiddo and Charly's own primping and mincing to herself in the mirror after he has hung up. Charly's character can thus be read as the film's commentary on how directors such as Sirk made use of Melodramatic aesthetics in surrounding his heroines with ironic metaphors.

Melodramatic color saturation and mise en scené also are used in the film to contrast George's cynical world view and skepticism toward myth and mainstream ideologies. While the majority of George's life is rendered in dull, cold hues throughout the film, this changes whenever he encounters someone more receptive to these ideas than he is. These same motifs are seen in George's memories of his life with Jim. This connection can be seen as expressing George's longing for the characters' unjaded and as of yet uncritical views of the world as he experiences nostalgia for a time when he was truly happy. Similar visuals are also used whenever George encounters someone younger than himself, as he fetishizes their vitality while trying to come to terms with own mortality. Through his use of these contrasts, Ford can thus be seen drawing on what Jonathan Goldberg (2002) calls the excesses of Melodrama, as a means of

illustrating the moments when the happiness of others is able to break through the dreariness and moroseness of his own existence. This occurs most noticeably when George is made to feel strong emotion himself, such as his lustful glances at young men playing tennis on the college courts or the moments when he meets people with whom he shares an affinity, such as Carlos, the hustler or Jennifer, a curious young girl who lives next door. These moments serve to remind George that there are still parts of the world with which he can identify and others who are similarly resistant to normative values and mythic binaries.

A Single Man also contains several filmic references which allude to how the melodramatic mode was used in cinema to represent queerness, both by sublimating it and demonizing it. The first filmic reference that is explicitly mentioned in the film occurs as George searches in his briefcase for his cheque book at the local bank. As George rifles through his possessions, he is surprised to see a pair of blue Mary-Jane shoes appear on the table in front of him. The figure wearing is revealed to be Jennifer Strunk, the young daughter of George's neighbors. As George gazes at her, she becomes saturated in radiant color and his own pallor becomes brighter as well, as if he is being energized by her presence. This hyperreal atmosphere serves to foreshadow the affinity that Jennifer shares with George for questioning the world around her. Jennifer asks George why he looks so sad and asks if he would like to meet their scorpion, Charlton Heston. She then brings out a jar from behind her back that is decorated with roman columns, and references the movie that her family named him from, *Ben-Hur* (1959). Jennifer tells George that every night they feed him something new and watch him kill it. She says that her father likens the jar to a coliseum said that he would like to throw George into it. When George asks why, Jennifer says that it is because her father says George is "Light in his loafers" even though he doesn't wear loafers, and that she suspects her brother is light in his

loafers too. This reference is ironic on multiple levels, as while Jennifer does not understand what the euphemism her father uses is referring to, she is able to infer on a subconscious level that it may link George to her brother. At the same time, the film that she and her father are referencing is famous for the subtle homosexual subplot that is allegedly encoded within it. Gore Vidal, one of the original writers on the film claims that he advised the film's director to tell the actor playing Mesalla that the unstated reason his character bears so much hatred toward the titular Ben Hur was that the two men had had a homosexual affair long ago which he wanted to continue but Hur did not. If this anecdote is true, Jennifer's father ironically failed to see the subtext behind the hypermasculinity on display in the film in much the same way as his daughter could not see past the literal meaning of his homophobic phrase regarding George.

Several explicit references to the objectifying nature of cinema and the ways in which it has been used to represent queer figures can be seen in the segment in which George encounters a handsome Hispanic hustler outside of a liquor store. The first of these occurs when George parks his car in front of an enormous billboard advertising *Psycho* (1960). *Psycho* has become notorious for its shock ending which reveals that motel proprietor Norman Bates has been taking on the persona of his overbearing mother (including dressing in her clothing and a long grey wig) and murdering young women who sexually arouse him. Psycho thus conflated gender non-conforming behaviors and queerness in general with mental illness and murderousness. The success of the film resulted in this association becoming a trope that has been used repeatedly in cinema and is still occasionally seen today.

George bumps into the hustler as he exits the store, dropping his bottle of gin which breaks, ruining a pack of cigarettes dropped by the hustler. George offers to buy him a new pack of cigarettes and the hustler accepts. This segment illustrates the objectifying nature of cinema

and the ways in which it encourages what Laura Mulvey calls “fetishistic scopophilia” or the love of looking (1998). As the two share a cigarette outside, George’s point of view shows an extreme closeup of the hustler’s mouth as he exhales. This is scored with a soundtrack of dramatic music accompanied the sound of George’s heart beating rapidly. His ardor is broken by the hustler telling him his name, Carlos. This interruption serves to reestablish Carlos’ status as a subject and remind George that he is not an object to be looked at. George apologizes for becoming distracted and gives the hustler a twenty-dollar bill as if to atone for staring and pay him for the privilege. Carlos follows George to his car, assuming from the money that George is picking him up. When George realizes this, he asks for another cigarette instead and the two engage in conversation while bathed in an unnaturally bright orange glow from the sky. This again serves to create an atmosphere which feels hyperreal, and can be seen as stemming from both George’s attraction to Carlos and his appreciation of his philosophical musings. Carlos reveals that he is from Madrid, and that his mother is a hairdresser. He notes that she gave him his current hairstyle because she thought it made him look like James Dean. This is a reference to the actor who was famous for his good looks and was cast in a number of renowned male weepies such as *East of Eden* (1955) *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Giant* (1956). Dean often played sensitive young men who struggled with their emotions and the demands of patriarchal masculinity. He also faced a lot of public scrutiny and speculation regarding his own sexuality. The discordant nature of filmic representation is also referenced in Carlos and George’s conversation when George remarks that he has never seen a sky like that, and Carlos tells him (in un-subtitled Spanish) that it is because of the smog, and that “A veces las cosas más horribles tienen un punto de encanto" or, *Sometimes awful things have their own kind of beauty*.

The overarching narrative of *A Single Man* concerns George’s struggle to overcome the

one mythic grand narrative that he is unable to rationalize or dismiss, Death. This is illustrated through both his struggles with grief over Jim's death, and through his meticulous planning of his own suicide. Throughout the film, George is shown making various preparations, including purchasing bullets for his revolver and leaving letters for Charly and his housekeeper in places where they will be sure to find them. He also lays out the suit in which he wishes to be buried in, with strict instructions including how he would like his necktie tied in a Windsor knot. However, despite his morbidity, George is offered a glimmer of hope through the interactions he has with one of his students, Kenny.

Kenny is portrayed in many ways as a double or counterpart of George himself. His youthful curiosity serves to remind George that he once shared these same qualities before he grew jaded and pessimistic. As the film progresses, Kenny expresses great admiration of George and is clearly attracted to him. He is first seen sitting beside a beautiful young blonde woman and waves at George as he passes him by. When George asks Kenny about his relationship with her, he says that they are good friends and admits to having had a sexual relationship with her in the past. This relationship can be seen as mirroring the one that George has with Charly. After George presents his lecture on fear to his English students and leaves the building, Kenny hurries to catch up with him. He says to George that he thoroughly appreciated the lecture and wonders why he doesn't speak to his students like that all the time. George replies that there are some things he cannot discuss entirely openly at school. The two then discuss the idea of fear, with Kenny asking George if there is anything he is afraid of. George replies that he is afraid of cars, thus indirectly referencing Jim's accident and his own obsession with death. Kenny then admits that "Sometimes my fear of things can almost paralyze me. It's like I get really panic stricken and I feel like I might explode or something...." Once again this mirrors George's own

predicament. Kenny later asks George if they can meet for a drink off campus, but George dismisses him, saying it will have to be another time.

A turning point in George's perspective is marked by his failure to go through with his suicide plans and an encounter with his neighbors' son shortly before meeting up with Charly. George notices from a window that his neighbors are having a cocktail party and decides to put on a dramatic opera record to drown out the noise of their social gathering. This music is bizarrely contrapuntal to the way in which George is shown awkwardly trying to figure out exactly how to shoot himself, as though he is self-consciously aware of how melodramatic his actions are. After having meticulously organized various documents and objects on his desk George props himself up on his bed with a pillow and puts his gun in his mouth, only to decide at the last minute to shoot himself from inside of a sleeping bag instead. Just as he finishes zipping himself up inside of the sleeping bag, the telephone rings, with Charly calling to remind him of their plans. As George leaves the house, he is ambushed by the Strunk's son Christopher, who jumps out of a bush and pretends to shoot him with a machine gun. The dramatic opera music from earlier swells as George imagines himself urinating all over the boy, recalling his earlier conversation with Jim about dogs being free to react do whatever they want. Instead, George strongly rebukes Christopher and waves to his neighbors as he gets in his car. This sequence is indicative of George beginning to take on Jim's advice and stop worrying about what other people think.

George's flashback to the night that he first met Jim and his subsequent visit to the same bar when he discovers he is out of whiskey is both another illustration of his grief and a critique of nostalgia in general. As George is ordering a bottle of whiskey to go at the bar, he sees Kenny entering. George smiles and tells the bartender to cancel his order. As Kenny and George share a

drink, George asks Kenny if he was looking for him, as he had asked for George's address from a department secretary earlier in the film. Kenny shyly responds that he isn't sure, but that he has been thinking about the issues discussed in their class the entire day. George playfully rebukes him, saying that it isn't important. Kenny argues that George's class is great, but that they somehow, they always get stuck talking about the past, which he feels does not matter. Given that *A Single Man* is a period piece set in the past, this comment is highly self-reflexive and can be seen as a critique on the ways in which genres such as the Melodrama have a tendency toward nostalgia and idealizing the past. Kenny remarks that everyone tells him "when you're older, you'll have all this experience, like its some great thing." George promptly responds that they are full of shit, and he has merely gotten sillier and sillier. Kenny then suggests that they go swimming. When George promptly agrees, Kenny laughs with surprise, admitting that he was merely testing him. Nevertheless, the two are then seen running out of the bar and onto a nearby beach.

George and Kenny are seen taking off their clothes and running into the ocean while bathed in blue moonlight. The coloring in this segment is reminiscent of the drowning figure seen at the beginning of the film, and as George begins to be overtaken by the rough waves, Kenny helps him back to the shore, and thus saves him both figuratively and literally. George invites Kenny to his home but when he begins to walk without putting on his clothes George remarks "Are you out of your mind? You can't go home like that!" he responds "Don't you know? We're invisible!." This serves as a reference both to George's lecture earlier in the day and to Jim's dry remark about George "always saying we're invisible" earlier in the film, and once again suggests Kenny as George's double.

In the final scenes of the film George and Kenny tour his house and Kenny

enthusiastically says that George has the "perfect setup" because he can come and go whenever he pleases. George then asks Kenny frankly why he asked the university secretary for his address, and why he is at his house with him now. Kenny responds that he felt George is someone that he could really talk to, and confesses that he was worried about him today. George responds by saying "What is there to worry about?." Immediately following this response, the drowned figure seen in the beginning of the film is seen again, this time however, it is bathed in a warm orange glow and can be seen moving its limbs. Just as the figure is about to surface for air, it is revealed that it was really George all along. George gasps himself awake and walks into his living room where he sees Kenny sleeping on the couch. Lifting the blanket that is draped over him, George frowns when he notices that Kenny has found his revolver. George takes the gun away and locks it safely in a drawer. He then throws all of the letters he composed regarding his suicide into his fireplace. Having saved his symbolic double from the danger of replicating his fate, George goes into his bedroom and seemingly suffers a heart attack. George then has a vision that Jim's spirit walks in and kneels to kiss him on the mouth, thus indicating that he has finally overcome his obsession with death and ideology, escaped the hold that they had over him.

In *A Single Man* director Tom Ford uses the melodramatic mode alongside a period setting to compare George Falconer's personal struggles with grief and mortality with those faced by everyone living under the strict and conservative social ideologies of the Eisenhower era. The film explores these in various contexts traditionally explored in the Melodrama such as politics, family roles, and the status of women, while also taking a more modern approach by self reflexively examining issues of past filmic representations and questioning the authority of academia. George's obsession with rationalizing ideology and maintaining control is depicted through his meticulous planning of his suicide, but he is ultimately able to overcome this over

the course of the film's narrative through his encounters with Kenny. This is dramatized at the film's conclusion through George's natural death via a heart attack, which is ultimately depicted as a happy ending as he symbolically steers Kenny away from following in his footsteps and imagines being reunited with Jim shortly before his death.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: MELODRAMA: REVOLUTIONARY FORM OR THERAPEUTIC CRUTCH?

Through my examination of the history of Melodrama and the three case studies I have examined, I have argued that melodrama as a mode is useful in making Queer stories universally legible and bringing them to a mainstream audience in thought provoking and potentially liberatory ways. However, while the form of Melodrama is largely democratic and aimed toward universal legibility, the manner in which it has been used as a genre throughout film history is still fundamentally conservative, requiring a close reading to understand and see through the irony with which some of its more subversive statements might be expressed. Thus, whenever Melodrama or the melodramatic form are used to express Queerness, great care needs to be taken to avoid its subjugating and othering tendencies, and thus reaffirming the feminist arguments made by Mulvey, Cook, Doane, Kaplan, and Williams. Instead, the tools offered by melodrama should be used in ways that expose the limits of such representation and formulate strategies for change.

Melodrama remains popular, both as a genre and a storytelling mode, in telling the stories of those on the LGBTQI spectrum. While contemporary representations of Queerness have largely evolved to become more sympathetic and respectful, the use of Melodramatic Tropes and Forms in depicting these characters can still be seen mirroring examples and trends from the Melodramas of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, even as Mainstream LGBTQI representation occurs at levels far greater than any decades prior.

As a genre, queer-themed melodramatic romance films have remained popular awards show fodder since the breakthrough of *Brokeback Mountain* in 2005. Examples of this have

emerged from all over the world, including *Blue is the Warmest Color [La Vie d'Adèle – Chapitres 1 & 2]* (2013) (France), *Carol* (2015) (USA), *Moonlight* (2016) (USA) (which won the Academy Award for Best Picture), and *Call Me by Your Name [Chiamami Col Tuo Nome]* (2017) (Italy). All of these films feature a central homosexual couple who explore their sexuality in various different contexts. Of note, however, is the fact that none of the films feature endings which can be unambiguously read as entirely happy. *Blue is the Warmest Color* and *Carol* each feature endings which are ostensibly happy but involve significant compromise on the part of their protagonists. In contrast, the endings of *Moonlight* and *Call Me by your Name* are largely tragic and feature characters who deny their sexuality. In *Moonlight* one adult protagonist tearfully admits that he has not been intimate with anyone since a single homosexual encounter in adolescence, while in *Call Me by your Name* a father sees his son's heart get broken by another man and confesses that he too had homosexual urges that he was too scared to act on in his adolescence. As such, while these films make significant strides in bringing sympathetic portrayals of LGBTQI narratives to the mainstream, they fail to break away from the fundamentally conservative nature of Melodrama as a form, and when "happy" endings do occur, they almost always come with the price of accepting some other form of repression.

Many Queer centered narratives in contemporary film and television can be seen revisiting themes popular in decades prior. A notable example of this is the large number of mainstream films and television shows depicting HIV/AIDS and the AIDS crisis throughout the 2000s and 2010s, which mirror the prominence that these topics achieved in the mid 1980s and 1990s. Some of these were in fact adaptions of prior works conceived in this period, such as *Rent* (2005) based on a 1996 Broadway musical and *The Normal Heart* (2014) a television film based on the 1985 stage play by noted LGBTQI rights activist Larry Kramer. A prominent example

based on an original script was the 2013 biopic *Dallas Buyers Club* which told the true story of Ron Woodruff, an AIDS Patient, who smuggled experimental drugs into the U.S. in the height of the AIDS crisis. While the film garnered three Academy Awards, it was not without controversy, with many arguing that having a fictionalized transgender character played by cisgender actor Jared Leto, was a missed opportunity for diversity in Trans representation. One of the most recent iterations of this trend is the British television serial *It's a Sin* which premiered in 2021. The show concerns the lives of a group of gay men in London at the height of the AIDS Crisis between 1981 and 1991 and features prominent actors such as Stephen Fry and Neal Patrick Harris in supporting roles.

While mainstream recognition of the AIDS crisis and its effects on the LGBTQI community is incredibly important, there are few examples of films which place these in a contemporary context. This is important both in the sense that AIDS should not be portrayed as an crisis occurring only in the past, and so that audiences can be made more aware of the issues that are still being faced by those living with HIV. Continuously portraying both AIDS narratives and those of the LGBTQI Community within the specific context of the AIDS Crisis runs the of risk of furthering the irrational fears that many had regarding HIV during that era, thus increasing both serophobia (HIV Phobia) and the stigmas still held against those within the community. Revisiting a painful past without balancing it with hope for the future also runs the risk of turning this dark period in LGBTQI history into what Eva Illouz terms a therapeutic narrative, in which the fight against this stigma becomes the goal, but because the suffering and hardships sustain its narrative, being thought of as "victims" of AIDS ultimately comes to define the community.

Some instances of LGBTQI representation through melodrama have been so iconic and

influential that they have been adapted into new versions and remade. 2020 saw Netflix distribute remakes of both *The Boys in the Band* (1970) and *Rebecca* (1940) which both feature stereotypical representations of their queer characters but are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of the sympathy of these portrayals. *Rebecca (2020)* features the same gothic narrative as the Daphne Du Maurier novel adapted by the 1940 version, in which a young bride is haunted by the lingering presence of her predecessor at the manor Manderley, and menaced by its housekeeper Mrs. Danvers, a queer coded villain who was devoted to her. The remake features the same iconic scene in which Mrs. Danvers shows the second Mrs. Danvers Rebecca's bedroom, including fetishistically showing off her lingerie and draping it over the new Mrs. De Winter. It also replicates the plot point of Danvers nearly succeeding in convincing her to jump to her death from a high window. The portrayal of Mrs. Danvers in this version is significant in that it allows her to state unequivocally what the 1940 version could only hint at because of the production code: that she set fire to Manderley in revenge because Maxime De Winter killed Rebecca, the only person she had ever loved. The original film had Danvers perish in the fire when she is crushed by a falling beam. The 2020 film diverges from this, with Mrs. Danvers instead walking to a nearby cliff shortly after setting Manderley ablaze. When the second Mrs. De Winter finds her there, Danvers says that she knows the new Mrs De Winter will stand by Maxim but predicts that she will never find happiness. Then, despite the new Mrs De Winter's pleas for her to stop, Danvers jumps to her death. Ultimately this ending can be read as far more regressive than the original, as Danvers dies at her own hand, as though she deems herself worthy of punishment due to her shame and grief at everything that had transpired.

The Boys in the Band (2020) is a remake of the 1970s chamber piece in which a group of gay men meet to celebrate a birthday party but end up playing a "game" of calling their ex-lovers

which exposes their emotional scars and personal shame. It largely follows the same script as the original film, down to recreating its period setting and (controversially) including racist and anti-Semitic slurs present in the original film and the 1968 play that both are based on. The only significant change that the 2020 version makes from the versions which preceded it is the inclusion of brief scenes which reveal where each of the characters went after the conclusion of the party. Although the 1970s film is now considered a classic portrayal of queer life in that era, it relies on several character tropes which are now considered stereotypical. While the remake may prove nostalgic for viewers who are familiar with the original, the producers of the film ultimately missed an opportunity to make a contemporary story instead, which would allow them address the themes explored in the film in a way that illustrates how they may or may not apply to a contemporary context while also considering what has and has not changed for the LGBTQI community.

A project which successfully illustrates how classic melodramatic queer texts can be presented in thought provoking new contexts was undertaken at the New York LGBTQ cinema festival NewFest in October of 2020, when a version of the screenplay for *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) was performed in a virtual staged reading by an all trans cast. This allowed them to give the text new meaning and spark conversations about the gender issues portrayed in the film. Producer Gaby Dunn argued that the project allowed her to" find a way to give people a chance to excel in roles they'd never be given the chance to do" (Parsons). Jen Richards, who played Ennis' wife Alma in the adaption argues that *Brokeback Mountain* could be seen as more than just a gay film, and that "it's very much a male movie. It's all about masculinity and the trap it was for Ennis and Jack … When you see it performed by trans men, the gender performance is so obvious. It's definitely implied in the film, but we're kind of bringing that element out more

into the light." (Parsons).

Beyond purely fictional stories, the melodramatic mode can also be seen at use in a large number of critically acclaimed biopics of famous figures throughout the 2010s and 2020s. These include tragic figures such as assassinated California politician Harvey Milk in *Milk* (2008) and British Mathematician and WWII Codebreaker Alan Turing (who was chemically castrated for being a homosexual) in *The Imitation Game* (2014). Also portrayed are figures who were notable in various fields such as artists Gerda Wegener and her wife Lili Elbe (one of the first recipients of a sex change operation) in *The Danish Girl* (2015) and lesbian tennis champion Billie Jean King in *Battle of the Sexes* (2017). A notable trend toward biopics dramatizing the lives of LGBTQI musicians occurred throughout the 2010s with the release of *Behind the Candelabra* (2013) about Liberace, *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018) about Queen vocalist Freddie Mercury, and *Rocket Man* about (2019) Elton John.

While these films can be argued as taking various degrees of liberty in fictionalizing the stories they tell, all of them can be seen structuring them in ways which mute some of the idiosyncrasies of their subject/s in favor of emphasizing the collective dimensions of their personal narratives and connections to "grand cultural key scenarios" such as defeating their enemies, besting their competitors, or falling in love. In this way, as argued by Eva Illouz, "the self takes its own self as an object of the gaze, as its own source of emotional spectacle and tension" and is at once "the victim of and the witness to evil done" (160). This connection to broader cultural issues is particularly noticeable in the dramatization of figures that are less well known as "celebrity" figures such as Alan Turing and Billie Jean King. *The Imitation Game* and *The Battle of the Sexes* center their dramatic conflicts around the achievements of their protagonists with regards to the Second World War and the Women's Liberation Movement

respectively, with their personal lives forming subplots that color the background. This is particularly noticeable in *The Battle of the Sexes,* with the film's title referring to both the 1973 exhibition tennis match the film is centered on and a catchphrase for the Women's Liberation Movement, and its trailer heavily emphasizing her battle against the self-professed "male chauvinist pig" and only vaguely hinting at her newfound attraction to her female secretary.

The "toning down" of queerness in an effort to promote what Peter Brooks calls the "universal legibility" of melodrama can also be seen when examining the directions taken with biopics of more well-known celebrity figures such as Freddie Mercury. When *Bohemian Rhapsody* premiered in 2018, many critics noted the film seemed to minimize Mercury's identity as a queer man, with critic Aja Romano of Vox News noting that "Bohemian Rhapsody is a movie that consciously tries to position a gay man at its center while strategically disengaging with the "gay" part as much as it can, flitting briefly over his emotional and sexual experiences and fixating on his platonic relationship with an ex-girlfriend instead"("Bohemian Rhapsody Loves Freddie Mercury's Voice"). Romano also argues that when the film does address Mercury's queerness, it is reduced "to a series of promiscuous sexual encounters, which it consistently frames as sordid, shameful, illicit, and corrupting." Notably, when biopics do not shy away from their subject's sexuality, it is often portrayed from a similar perspective and is portrayed as a source of their shame and unhappiness. This can be seen in *Behind the Candelabra*, a 2013 biopic which depicts the dissolution of the relationship between the 53-year-old Liberace and his 23-year-old assistant due to drug abuse and Liberace's taste for younger men. In real life, Liberace was largely conservative and never publicly revealed his diagnosis with HIV/Aids. In focusing on his sexuality in this manner, the film makes a spectacle of his internalized homophobia and self-loathing, and ultimately ends in an ambiguous manner in

which this is never resolved.

My analyses of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *A Single Man* (2009) and *Carol* (2015) have revealed their references to and places within the history of Melodrama as a filmic genre while also examining how they made use of Melodramatic form to bring queer stories to a mainstream audience. While the melodramatic mode remains a useful tool for creating pathos within the audience and rendering queer stories universally legible, great care needs to be taken in avoiding the subjugating and othering tendencies that Melodrama as a genre has fostered in the past, exposing the limits of this kind of representation, and formulating strategies for change in the future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Almodóvar, Pedro, director. *Entre Tinieblas.* Wellspring, 1983

Almodóvar, Pedro, director. *Pepi, Luci, Bom y Otras Chicas del Montón*. Fígaro Films. 1980

Aaron, Michele, editor. *New Queer Cinema: a Critical Reader*. Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Asher, William. *Beach Party*. American International Pictures. 1963.

Barrios, Richard. *Screened out: Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall*. Routledge, 2003.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers, Hill and Wang, 1972.

Bressan. Arthur J., director. *Buddies*. Newline, 1985

Benshoff, Harry M., and Sean Griffin. *Queer Images: a History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Becker, Ron. "Gay-Themed Television and the Slumpy Class: The Affordable, Multicultural Politics of the Gay Nineties." *Television & New Media*, vol. 7, no. 2, May 2006, pp. 184–21

Becker, Ron. "Prime-time television in the gay nineties: network television, quality audiences, and gay politics." *Velvet Light Trap*, 1998, p. 36-47

Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. Yale University Press, 1976.

Cawelti, John G. "The Evolution of Social Melodrama." *Imitations of Life: a Reader on Film & Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy, Wayne State Univ. Press, 1991, pp. 33–50.

Columbus, Chris, director. *Rent.* Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005.

Cook, Pam. "Melodrama and the Women's Picture." *Imitations of Life: A Reader on the Film and Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy, Wayne State University Press, 1991, pp. 248–262.

Cooper, Brenda & Edward C. Pease "Framing *Brokeback Mountain*: How the Popular Press Corralled the 'Gay Cowboy Movie,'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25:3, 249-273. 2008.

Creed, Barbara "The Position of women in Hollywood Melodramas" *Australian Journal of Screen Theory*, no. 4, 1977

Davies, Jude, and Carol R. Smith. *Gender, Ethnicity and Sexuality in American Film*. Keele University Press, 1997.

Dearden, Basil, director. *Victim*. Rank Film Distributors, 1961.

Deitch, Donna, director. *Desert Hearts.* Samuel Goldwyn, 1986.

Doane, Mary Ann. "The Women's Film: Possession and Address" *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*. Edited by Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams. University Publications of America, Inc., 1984.

Dyer, Richard. *The Culture of Queers*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002.

Dyer, Richard. *Gays and Film*. New York Zoetrope, 1984.

Dyer, Richard. *The Matter of Images: Essay on Representations*. Routledge, 1993.

Dyer, Richard. *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*. Routledge, 1990.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Melodrama and Victimhood: Modern Political and Militant" *Melodrama After The Tears: New Perspectives On The Politics Of* Victimhood, edited by Jörg Metelmann & Scott Loren, Amsterdam University Press, 2016. Pp. 35-52

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Tales of Sound and Fury." *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies on Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, British Film Institute/Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 43–70.

Elliot, Stephan, director. *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Gramercy Pictures, 1994.

Epstein, Rob and Jeffrey Friedman, directors. *The Celluloid Closet*. Sony Pictures Classics, 1996.

Erman, John, director. *An Early Frost*. NBC Productions, 1985.

Farris, Valerie, director. *The Battle of the Sexes*. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2018

Fassbinder, Rainer Werner, director. *Ali, Fear Eats the Soul = Angst Essen Seele Auf*. Tango Film, 1974.

Fassbinder, Rainer Werner, director. *Die Bitteren Tränen Der Petra Von Kant = The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant*. New Yorker Films, 1972.

Fassbinder, Rainer W. "Fassbinder on Sirk." *Film Comment*, Translated by Thomas Elsaesser, vol. 11, no. 2, 1975, pp. 22–24.

Fassbinder, Rainer W, director. *Faustrecht Der Freiheit = Fox and His Friends*. Tango Film , 1975.

Fletcher, Dexter, director. *Rocketman*. Paramount, 2019

Ford, Tom, director. *A Single Man*. The Weinstein Company, 2009.

Friedan Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton & Company 1997.

Friedkin, William, director. *The Boys in the Band*. Cinema Center Films, 1970.

Gerstner, David. "The Production and Display of the Closet: Making Minnelli's 'Tea and Sympathy.'" *Film Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3, 1997, pp. 13–26., doi:10.2307/1213613.

Gledhill, Christine. "Christine Gledhill on 'Stella Dallas' and Feminist Film Theory." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1986, pp. 44–48., doi:10.2307/1225082.

Gledhill, Christine, editor. *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. British Film Institute, 1987.

Gledhill, Christine. "Recent Developments in Feminist Film Criticism." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, by Gerald Mast et al., Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 93–120.

Gledhill, Christine, and Linda Williams, editors. *Reinventing Film Studies*. Arnold, 2000.

Goldberg, Jonathan. *Melodrama: an Aesthetics of Impossibility*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Guadagnino, Luca, director. *Chiamami Col Tuo Nome*. Sony Pictures Classics, 2017.

Halliday, Jon and Douglas Sirk. *Sirk on Sirk: Interviews with Jon Halliday*. Viking Press, 1972.

Halperin, David M., and Valerie Traub, editors. *Gay Shame*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Hamilton, William L. "Did Success Spoil Tab Hunter?" *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 18 Sept. 2005. Web. 26 Mar. 2021.

Haskell, Molly. *From Reverence to Rape: the Treatment of Women in the Movies*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974.

Haynes, Todd, director. *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*. American International Video Search, Inc, 1988.

Haynes, Todd, director. *Carol*. Studio Canal, 2015.

Haynes, Todd, director. *Far from Heaven*. Focus Features, 2002.

Haynes, Todd, director. *Mildred Pierce*. HBO, 2011.

Haynes, Todd, director. *Poison*. Zeitgeist Films, 1991.

Haynes, Todd, director. *Safe*. Sony Pictures Classics, 1995.

Hillyer, Lambert, director. *Dracula's Daughter*. Universal, 1936.

Hoar, Peter, director. *It's a Sin.* Red Production Company 2021.

Hoberman, James. "How the Western Was Lost" *The Western Reader* edited by Jim Kitses and Greg Rickman, Limelight Editions, 1999.

Hooper, Tom, director. *The Danish Girl*. Focus Features, 2015.

Hunter, Tab and Eddie Muller. *Tab Hunter Confidential* Algonquin Books, 2005.

Huxley, Aldous. *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. Chatto and Windus, 1950.

Illouz, Eva. "The Melodrama Of The Self" *Melodrama After The Tears: New Perspectives On The Politics Of* Victimhood, edited by Jörg Metelmann & Scott Loren, Amsterdam University Press, 2016. Pp. 157-168

Isherwood, Christopher. *A Single Man.* Simon & Schuster, 1964.

Jarman, Derek, director. *Jubilee.* Criterion. 1978

Jarman, Derek, director. *Sebastiane*. Cinegate. 1976.

Jarman, Derek, director. *The Tempest.* Kino International. 1979.

Jenkins, Barry, director. *Moonlight.* Lionsgate 2016.

Jordan, Neal, director. *The Crying Game* Miramax, 1992.

Kahn, Richard C, director. *Children of Loneliness*. Jewel Productions Inc., 1937.

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Feminism and Film*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Kaplan, E. Ann., editor. *Psychoanalysis & Cinema*. Routledge, 1990.

Kazan, Elia, director. *East of Eden*. Warner Brothers 1955

Kechiche Abdellatif, director. *La Vie d'Adèle*. Criterion, 2013.

King, Geoff. *American Independent Cinema*. Indiana University Press. 2005

Klinger, Barbara. *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Indiana University Press, 1994.

Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity ." *Gay Shame*, by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 49–62.

Lang, Robert. *American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli*. Princeton University Press, 1989.

Lee, Ang, director. *Brokeback Mountain*. Focus Features, 2006.

Mankiewicz, Joseph L., director. *Suddenly, Last Summer*. Columbia Pictures, 1959.

Mercer, John, and Martin Shingler. *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility*. Columbia University Press, 2013.

Merck, Mandy (Ed.). *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. Routledge, 1992.

Metelmann Jörg & Scott Loren, editors. *Melodrama After The Tears: New Perspectives On The Politics Of Victimhood.* Amsterdam University Press, 2016.

Minnelli, Vincente, director. *Tea and Sympathy*. Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1956.

Morrison, James, editor. *The Cinema of Todd Haynes: All That Heaven Allows*. Wallflower, 2007.

Mulvey, Laura. "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama." *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies on Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, British Film Institute/Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 75–82

Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Indiana Univ. Press, 1998.

Munt, Sally. *Queer Attachments: the Cultural Politics of Shame*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007.

Murphy, Ryan, director. *The Boys in the Band*. Netflix, 2020.

Murphy, Ryan, director. *The Normal Heart*. HBO, 2014.

Neale, Steve. *Genre and Hollywood*. Routledge, 2000.

Neale, Steve. "Melodrama and Tears." *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 6, 1986, pp. 6–23., doi:10.1093/screen/27.6.6.

Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. "Minnelli and Melodrama." *Imitations of Life: a Reader on Film & Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy, Wayne State Univ. Press, 1991, pp. 268-274

Ortner, Sherry B. *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream*. Duke University Press. 2013

Parsons, Vic. "Brokeback Mountain Reimagined WITH All-trans Cast and It's 90 Full Minutes of Unashamed QUEER EXCELLENCE." *Pink News.* Web. 19 Oct. 2020.

Peirce, Kimberly, director. *Boys Don't Cry*. Fox-Searchlight, 1999.

Penley, Constance, editor. *Feminism and Film Theory*. Routledge, 1988.

Pomerance, Murray, editor. *A Family Affair: Cinema Comes Home*. Wallflower Press, 2008.

Preminger, Otto, director. *Advise and Consent*. Columbia Pictures, 1962.

Proulx Annie, et al. *Brokeback Mountain Story to Screenplay.* Scribner, 2005.

Ray, Nicholas, director. *Rebel without a Cause*. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1955.

Rappaport, Mark. *The Vanity Tables of Douglas Sirk*. Self-Released. 2015

Rene, Norman, director. *Longtime Companion*. Samuel Goldwyn Pictures, 1989.

Rodowick, David N. "Madness, Authority and Ideology: The Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s" *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies on Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, British Film Institute/Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 268-282

Romano, Aja. "Bohemian Rhapsody Loves Freddie Mercury's Voice. It Fears His Queerness." *Vox.* 16 Nov. 2018. Web.

Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*. Harper & Row, 1987.

Schatz, Thomas. "The Family Melodrama." *Imitations of Life: A Reader on the Film and Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy, Wayne State University Press, 1991, pp. 148–167.'

Shattuc, Jane. *Television, Tabloids and Tears: Fassbinder and Popular Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Sheldon, Caroline. "Lesbians and Film: Some Thoughts." *Gays and Film*, by Richard Dyer, New York Zoetrope, 1984, pp. 5–26.

Sherwood, Bill, director. *Parting Glances*. Cinecom Pictures. 1986

Sirk, Douglas, director. *All That Heaven Allows*. Universal Pictures Co., Inc., 1955.

Sirk, Douglas, director. *Magnificent Obsession*. Universal Pictures Co., Inc., 1954.

Singer, Bryan. *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2018

Soderbergh, Stephen, director. *Behind the Candelabra.* Warner Home Entertainment, 2013.

Stacey, Jackie. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. Routledge, 1994.

Stevens, George, director. *Giant*. Warner Brothers, 1956.

Tinkcom, Matthew. *Queer Theory and Brokeback Mountain*. Bloomsbury. 2017.

Tompkins, Jane. *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* Oxford University Press. 1992

Tyler, Parker. *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies*. Da Capo Press, 1993.

Tyldum Morten, director. *The Imitation Game*. Anchor Bay Entertainment. 2014

Vallée, Jean-Marc, director. *Dallas Buyers Club.* Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2013.

Van Sant, Gus, director. *Milk*. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2008.

Walters, Suzanna Danuta. *All the Rage: the Story of Gay Visibility in America*. University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Warner, Michael, editor. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Harvard University Press, 2001. ‘

Waters, John, director. *Desperate Living*. New Line Cinema, 1977. Film.

Waters, John, director, *The Diane Linkletter Story*. New Line Cinema, 1970. Film.

Waters, John, director. *Female Trouble*. Perf. Divine. New Line Cinema, 1974. Film.

Waters, John, director. *Polyester*. Perf. Divine. Tab Hunter. New Line Cinema, 1981. Film.

Whatling, Clare. *Screen Dreams: Fantasizing Lesbians in Film*. Manchester University Press, 1997.

Wheatley, Ben, director. *Rebecca*. Netflix, 2020.

Williams, Linda. “Melodrama Revised.” *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, edited by Nick Browne, University of California Press, 1998, pp. 42–89.

Wyler, William, director. *The Children's Hour*. United Artists, 1962.

Wyler, William, director. *Dark Victory*. Warner Brothers, 1939.

Žižek. Slavoj, screenwriter.*The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*. Dir. Sophie Fiennes. Perf. Slavoj Žižek. Zeitgeist Films, 2012.